**University College Dublin**

**REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

**Periodic Quality Review**

**UCD School of Geography**

**July 2022**

**Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting of 11 May 2023**

# Table of Contents

# Key Findings of the Review Group

The Review Group (RG) has identified several key findings in relation to areas of good practice operating within the School of Geography, 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 have highlighted the following commendations in particular:

1. The School has a strong recognition externally and is ranked in the top 100 Schools in QS subject rankings. The School currently is ranked no. 1 in Ireland and is situated between 101 and 150 in the 2021 QS World University Rankings for Geography. The staff are all very dedicated and clearly committed. (2.16)

2. All faculty, professional and technical staff that met with the RG were clearly engaged, collaborative and collegial in their engagements as a School and more widely with College and University strategic objectives. (2.17)

3. All School staff are actively engaged with teaching and learning across the various programmes, both at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level. Many elements of teaching and learning are 'research informed' or 'research led' and so engaging students directly with the knowledge frontier in geography and allied subjects. (4.8)

4. 100% of the staff are engaged in research, and publishing quality outputs and attracting funding for research. Strong connections also exist through individual interdisciplinary research collaborations with internal and external colleagues in other disciplines (6.5)

5. The RG commend the sabbatical leave system, which while challenging to manage from a teaching/administration point of view, provides time and space for staff to focus on quality research. It is commendable the School is working to formalise a sabbatical policy using UCD's Research Sabbatical Leave policy for guidance. (6.10)

## Prioritised Recommendations for Improvement

The RG would suggest that the following recommendations be prioritised:

1.  The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example, the Curriculum Management System. (3.15)

2.  The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address over-assessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload. (4.12)

3.  Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on hardcopy versus electronic comments on e-copy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences. (4.13)

4.  Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders. (5.11)

5.  There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the post-award area when large grants have been secured. The SAR refers to enhancing in-house support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively. (6.11)

# 1. Introduction and Overview of UCD School of Geography

*Introduction*

1.1     This report presents the findings of a quality review of the School of Geography, University College Dublin, which was undertaken on 11-14 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 Geography was as follows:

- Dr Margaret Fitzsimons, Dean of the Institute of Bankers (IOB), a recognised college of UCD (Chair)

- Associate Professor Mary Casey, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems, UCD (Deputy Chair)

- Professor Stephen Tooth, Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK (subject matter expert)

1.6     The RG virtually visited the School from 11-14 April 2022 and held meetings with School staff (including the Head of School, representatives of School faculty and professional staff), undergraduate and postgraduate students, graduates, including alumni now in employment, and other university staff, including the College Principal of Social Sciences and Law, the Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities, and the Associate Dean for Social Sciences and Law. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 3. All members of the RG participated in 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. This report has been read and approved by all members of the Review Group.

*Preparation of the Self-assessment Report (SAR)*

1.8     Following a briefing from the UCD Quality Office, a Self-assessment Report Coordinating Committee (SARCC) was established by the School.

1.9     The SAR was prepared in the period March to December 2021.  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.   All staff were given the opportunity to discuss and comment on the final draft and to contribute to the final report.

1.10    The RG found the SAR to be a comprehensive document outlining key research strengths of the School.

*The University*

1.11    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 4 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.

1.12    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

1.13    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 Geography*

1.14    UCD's School of Geography is located in the John Henry Newman Building on the Belfield Campus of University College Dublin.

1.15    Geography is one of eleven schools in the College of Social Sciences and Law.

1.16    The School is medium-size, with an FTE of 10.0 permanent and 3.0 fixed term faculty (5-year contracts), and an FTE of 6.5 for Research staff. For professional and technical staff, the School has a School Manager (0.5 FTE), a School Executive Assistant (1.0 FTE) and a Technical Officer (1.0 FTE). (March 2022 data provided by the School).

1.17    The School has 3 Full Professors, 4 Associate Professors and 6 Assistant Professors. (March 2022 data provided by the School).

1.18    The School offers a range of programme offerings across levels 8 and 9. At level 8 it offers a four-year geography degree as part of the BSc Social Science (DN700) and a three-year degree under Arts and Humanities, Bachelor of Arts (DN520) and an undergraduate, Bachelor of Science in Sustainability (DN240), a four-year degree developed with the School of Biology and Environmental Science.

1.19    The School currently has 269 student registrations, with 183 undergraduate registrations. (March 2022 data provided by the School).

1.20    Across level 9 there are six Masters offered on a full and part time basis:

   - MA in Geography
   - MA Geopolitics and the Global Economy
   - MSc Critical Geographies: Power and Inequalities
   - MSc Geospatial Data Analysis
   - MSc Risk, Resilience and Sustainability

1.21    The MSc Geospatial Data Analysis and the MSc Risk, Resilience and Sustainability are also offered as 60 credit graduate diplomas.

1.22    The School has a new BSc Sustainability degree, which was established in 2020 jointly by Geography and the Earth Institute. There are two streams to this programme: social science and environmental science.

1.23    It was evident to the RG through the information provided in the SAR and the discussions with staff and stakeholders, that the School "punches above its weight" with research outputs. An area of concern for the RG was the falling numbers of undergraduate students and the five Masters' programmes with only 37 students.

1.24    The last quality review of the School took place in 2012 and was conducted with respect to the then School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy (GPEP). Following a restructuring, the School was split and became the School of Geography in 2015. Planning and Environmental Policy merged with the UCD School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy.


## 2. Organisation and Management of Resources

*General Comments and Context*

2.1    The School has undergone substantial strategic restructuring since 2015, which has resulted in some management challenges particularly with the need to address a substantial financial deficit. Related to these challenges is the need to increase the student intake both in the undergraduate and taught graduate offerings and balancing this intake with increased staffing costs to support the ongoing development of the School.

2.2    The School's mission is to create a sustainable global society, transforming through digital technology, building a healthy world, empowering humanity.

2.3    The School objectives include increasing the quality, quantity and impact of their research, scholarship and innovation, providing an inclusive educational experience that defines international best practice and prepares their graduates to thrive in present and future societies; continuing to build engagement locally, nationally and internationally; attract, retain and develop an excellent and diverse cohort of students, faculty and staff.

2.4    The School also aligns their strategic objectives with those of the University in respect of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

2.5    The School of Geography is based on a specific discipline – Geography – which is traditionally divided into Human and Physical Geography. The School operates within broader University structures, being part of the College of Social Sciences and Law (CSSL) and is in regular formal and informal contact with College staff and structures.

2.6     The Head of School attends College Executive, College Heads of School Forum, BSc Programme Board, and other meetings, and has ongoing communication with the College Principal. The College provides essential support, particularly in terms of human resources, finance and graduate matters, promotional and marketing strategies, and internationalisation. The Head of School is also a member of the Extended Leadership Group and President's Head of School forum.

2.7     The School's undergraduate student numbers have dropped significantly over the last 5 years: from 402 in 2015 to 295 in 2021. This has impacted on the student-staff ratio which has moved from 46:1 in 2015 to 16:1 in 2021. The student: staff ratio is in line with best practice in UCD and more favourable to the School than some other Schools in UCD. The School have however raised concerns about the number of staff in the School: this is noted but with the declining student numbers it is difficult to see how requests for more staff could be considered at the current time.

2.8     The School Executive comprises key office holders in the School and a representative of administrative staff. The Executive assists the Head of School in developing strategy and meets every 5-6 weeks during teaching periods, normally before a School staff meeting. Staff meetings are open to all contracted staff and focus on School strategic plans, day-to-day business, and other operational matters. The relatively small size of the School presents some challenges but also supports communication between staff and students.

2.9     The bulk of the School's administrative work for faculty is conducted through Committee work. The School has four permanent committees: Teaching and Learning (T&L), Research, Global Engagement, Graduate. These match equivalent College-level Committees. The School's Heads of Committees are members of the equivalent College-level Committee.

2.10    The RG supports the School's findings in the SAR of the need for succession planning for School staff to ensure that faculty are ready for future academic leadership roles.

2.11    The School of Geography has a good gender balance, and diversity in career stages and nationalities exists among the School staff (both faculty and professional staff). The School maintains UCD's requirement for minimum 40% gender representation on all Committees where possible.

2.12    The School budgetary baseline was established in 2013-2014 as part of UCD's restructuring of University finances. This baseline was established using a metric that applied before the School split from Planning and Environmental Policy in 2015. In the SAR, the School noted the non-pay budget is usually insufficient for the School to plan strategic initiatives. The School notes this as a key challenge when, for example, it seeks to develop a strong marketing campaign for the GIS/Remote sensing programmes.

2.13    The School has made beneficial contributions to UCD and actively serves on various UCD Committees such as the Ethics Committee, the Discipline Committee, Teaching & Learning, Unified Support Model (USM), Covid Steering Committee, among others.

2.14    The School holds an annual Research Away Day to focus on research strategy and review, which is organised by the Research Committee. This is a great opportunity to share best practice.

2.15    The School outlined a number of challenges in the SAR, including the desire to grow student numbers. Based on the 2012 quality review, the RG recommended that building the GIS programme would be an excellent strategic objective. In recent years, the School of Geography has progressed this objective, along with offerings in remote sensing. Over the next three years, it plans to build these offerings further. The School has so far established an MSc in Geospatial Data Analysis and an MSc in Risk, Resilience & Sustainability, to which both GIS and remote sensing are related. A GIS laboratory of 23 computers has also been set up within the School.

**Commendations**

2.16    The School has a strong recognition externally and is ranked in the top 100 Schools in QS subject rankings. The School currently is ranked no. 1 in Ireland and is situated between 101 and 150 in the 2021 QS World University Rankings for Geography. The staff are all very dedicated and clearly committed.

2.17    All faculty, professional and technical staff that met with the RG were clearly engaged, collaborative and collegial in their engagements as a School and more widely with College and University strategic objectives.

**Recommendations**

2.18    The School should consider undertaking further review of module provision at postgraduate level and look at possibilities for consolidation of pathways, particularly where there are very low numbers of students on modules.

2.19    To address low student uptake, the RG recommends also considering the name of the Masters' programmes and if they are sufficiently clear to the markets they wish to attract (e.g. should the name of the MSc in Geospatial Data Analysis be changed to MSc in 'Geographic Information Systems' or incorporate the term 'Geodata'?). Using a globally recognised name may enable the programmes to be found by more prospective students (e.g. in a Google search). (see also 5.11 below)

2.20    The RG recommend the development of a School succession plan for academics in respect of leadership roles.

# 3. Staff and Facilities

*General Comments and Context*

3.1    Since the last quality review (2012), the School has expanded its GIS/Remote sensing offerings, following two academic staff appointments with expertise in this area.

3.2    The School's workload model allocates equal teaching loads to all staff (4 modules per year) and rotates administrative responsibilities among staff. The current Head of School maintains a spreadsheet of administrative tasks. The School notes in the SAR that owing to low staff numbers, relative to other UCD schools, the administrative burden is spread across less people, mostly due to the number of committees and administrative responsibilities required at university level, which include GDPR, ethics, teaching & learning, and marketing of postgraduate programmes.

3.3    During the summer months, staff are encouraged by the Head of School to focus on research and where possible, keep School administrative duties to a minimum. The RG suggest it is also worth considering in advance of sabbatical leave (see also 6.3 below), how the teaching and administrative workload of the staff member going on sabbatical will be managed. A workload model was provided by the Head of School but perhaps greater transparency for staff could be provided going forward.

A.    <u>Staff</u>

3.4    In 2018 the School's academic staff profile was 29% female and 71% male, with the new appointments including a full professor under the UCD Strategic Hire initiative, have brought the School in 2022 to 46 % female and 54 % male. For Research, the gender profile is 51% female,  49% male (March 2022 data provided by the School).

3.5    Seven staff are international and six are Irish (although two of the latter have spent the better part of their career abroad and have recently returned to Ireland). The School is thus diverse. The average age of all School staff is mid-40s over a wide age range, down from an average age of 50 in 2017.

3.6    The SAR notes there has been a reduction in technical and professional staff in the School since the restructuring in 2015.

3.7    The current budgetary deficit means that there is a consequent moratorium on staff hire, which also inhibits the School's ambitions to cover gaps in the curricula and/or grow certain programmes.

3.8    New faculty appointments receive an informal induction into the School, organised by the Head of School and informed by College of Social Science and Law (CSSL) and UCD induction programmes as relevant.

B.  Facilities

3.9     The School has individual offices for each of its faculty, technical and professional staff. In addition School facilities include one physical geography laboratory, two postgraduate/postdoctoral rooms, one GIS laboratory, one large teaching room fitting and two smaller teaching rooms.

3.10    The School reports in the SAR its plan to further grow student numbers in GIS/remote sensing, both within the School's Masters' programmes and through UCD students from outside the School and, ultimately, to attract student cohorts from outside UCD for training with a variety of options, such as certificates, diplomas and summer school (the latter which has been successfully piloted in summer 2019). The School is considering converting a room into an expanded GIS laboratory to be used for remote sensing and drones' work, which would give the School several additional high-spec computers.

**Commendations**

3.11    The School should be commended for rebalancing diversity in gender in recent years through strategic hires.

**Recommendations**

3.12    As the School has highlighted the heavy administrative burden with committees, research funding etc., consideration needs to be given as to whether five staff members are necessary on the taught Graduate Committee, and perhaps reduce this in line with how other Schools in the College are represented on this committee.

3.13    The RG recommend a review of the workload model operating in the School.

3.14    Feedback from PhD students highlighted that their designated study space is valued and the RG recommend this space be maintained.

3.15    The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example,  the Curriculum Management System.

3.16    Linked to 3.15 above, the RG recommends consideration also of a more formal mentorship programme (newly appointed and more junior faculty linked with more senior faculty) to assist those more junior staff to maintain and enhance their research, while also getting their teaching and administrative duties up and running.

3.17    The RG recommends consideration be given to incorporating marketing activities into the role of a designated administrative person to help promote the Masters' programmes, especially through consideration of naming/branding and statement of unique selling points. (see also 2.19 above).

## 4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

*General Comments and Context*

4.1  The RG recognises that the School has gone through some challenging times since the divergence from Planning and Environmental Policy, and that the various programmes and pathways have evolved since. Staff have worked hard to maintain and improve teaching, learning and assessment standards, while also working to maintain and improve research activities and balance an increasingly demanding set of School (and in some cases, higher level) administrative roles.  This demanding situation has been made all the more challenging with maintaining teaching, learning and assessments during a global pandemic.

4.2  Many areas of excellence in teaching, learning and assessment undoubtedly exist within the School. The RG noted a number of areas of best practice including some module coordinators moving towards rubric feedback and the SAR reports increases in grading efficiency and student satisfaction with feedback received. The RG noted further opportunities for improvement, such as better sharing of best practice across and beyond the School.

4.3  The School's undergraduate student numbers have not returned to the pre-2018/2019 level. The School plans to monitor this and will try and expand their reach in terms of joint offerings within the BA Joint Honours (DN520) programme and assessing opportunities for having modules listed in new undergraduate offerings. The BSc Sustainability (DN240) also offers substantial opportunities for adding new students to the cohort as Geography plays a central role in providing both core and optional modules on the programme. The RG commends the School for their contribution.

4.4  The demand for GIS modules from across the University is increasing. The positive in this is the potential for additional students for the School and the negative is the additional workload on the staff.

4.5  Further consideration needs to be given to reducing over-assessment at undergraduate level. The large 1st year modules in particular seem to have many individual pieces of assessment associated with them, some with marks for attendance and/or participation.  Too many assessments in some parts of the modules or programmes may not allow students to perform to the best of their abilities, especially where deadline "bunching" occurs. Too many assessments also contribute to increased staff workload, particularly through module management (e.g. managing email traffic, collating marks), and introduces challenges in ensuring an ability to assess fairly and consistently, particularly when multiple markers are involved.

4.6  In their discussions, the RG found uncertainty exists among students, and/or there is perceived inequity among students, regarding which academic years contribute to the final GPA. In some cases, it is Year 2 and 4, and in other cases it is Years 2, 3 and 4. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring all students are aware of the rules for their programmes.

4.7    The RG noted challenges associated with the dissertation research modules (and particularly securing timely ethical approval) can be stressful for students. The School could benefit from ensuring all students undertaking research are fully aware of UCD ethical approval dates and documentation submission requirements.

**Commendations**

4.8    All School staff are actively engaged with teaching and learning across the various programmes, both at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level. Many elements of teaching and learning are 'research informed' or 'research led' and so engaging students directly with the knowledge frontier in geography and allied subjects.

4.9    Good consideration has been given to developing pathways for progression through the various levels of the undergraduate programmes and, if applicable, through the Masters' programmes. This is evidenced in the SAR by the development of the MSc Critical Geographies and MSc Risk, Resilience & Sustainability. These umbrella offerings are designed to maximise staff input, offer students an opportunity to select from graduate modules across the curriculum and offer clear pathways for progression from current undergraduate programmes to these taught graduate offerings.

4.10   The RG commends the School for their contribution to the undergraduate programme in Sustainability (DN240).

4.11   There has been increasing emphasis on embedding subject-specific and transferable skills in the programmes, especially with a view to enhancing student employability. The introduction of fieldwork at every stage of the 4-year degree programme is to be commended.

**Recommendations**

4.12   The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address over-assessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload.

4.13   Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on hardcopy versus electronic comments on e-copy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences.

4.14   The RG recommends consideration be given to producing pedagogy-related publications, either for specialist geographical pedagogical journals and/or for publications or targeted at secondary school students taking geography or related subjects.  This provides opportunities for sharing of best practice, enhancing promotion applications, and improved marketing.

4.15    Within the parameters set by the University, and in liaison with the College, greater consideration could be given to combining the best elements of online provision with face-to-face provision, for pedagogical reasons, for equality, diversity and inclusivity (e.g. widening access) reasons, and also for marketing reasons. The RG recommends that the School develop a School Teaching and Learning strategy that is aligned with the University. For example, there could be more pre-recorded lectures where the basic topic content is delivered, and then face-to-face activities that are based around discussions of that content and/or active learning exercises that apply the content.

4.16    The School could benefit from ensuring all students undertaking research are fully aware of UCD ethical approval dates and the associated requirement for timely documentation submission. This will facilitate approval in a timely manner and enable students to commence their research.

## 5. Curriculum Development and Review

*General Comments and Context*

5.1    The RG was impressed by the School's work on mapping all of the undergraduate modules' learning outcomes to the programme outcome in order to offer students a fully outcome-based curriculum. As part of BSc Social Science (DN700), the new Year 3 focuses on offering students practical and experiential based modules, while Year 4 comprises modules focused on staff-specific research specialisms. The addition of practical fieldwork at each stage of the curriculum ensures opportunities for real-world learning that develops interpersonal, intercultural and life skills inside and outside the classroom. Links between module learning outcomes and assessment have been developed and reviewed to ensure that modules at each stage are assessing the full range of learning outcomes throughout their offerings. This is now the foundation for the rationalisation of assessment that is ongoing.

5.2    Students can undertake academic exchanges at undergraduate, master's and PhD levels. More specifically, DN700 facilitates and encourages academic exchanges and internships, during stage 3.

5.3    Recent (last 5-7 years) portfolio refreshment has also taken place at postgraduate level to rationalise and focus on areas of strength and/or where there are perceived market gaps. For example, new postgraduate qualifications were introduced: MSc Critical Geographies, MSc Risk, Resilience & Sustainability, and MSc Geospatial Data Analysis. These new Masters were introduced to maximise the potential of new School staff hires and to address an assessed gaps in taught Masters offerings in the Irish Geography landscape.

5.4    The SAR notes that in 2021, the School had 37 students enrolled in its Masters programmes, as follows:- MSc Geopolitics and the Global Economy (8), MSc Geospatial Data Analysis (11), MSc Risk and Resilience (7), MA Geography (2), MSc Critical Geographies (9). Numbers to date are low across the School's postgraduate taught programmes. The RG suggest more work is needed on marketing and student recruitment to increase numbers.

5.5    As with teaching, learning and assessment, the RG found that many areas of excellence in curriculum development and review exist within the School, some areas for improvement also exist, such as reviewing the assessment strategies for postgraduate programmes as per those at undergraduate level.

5.6    Consideration should be given to developing elements of online/blended provision as a way of attracting students to the degree programmes from outside the traditional Irish areas (e.g. along the east coast and the rest of Leinster) and from outside the traditional student profiles (e.g. mature-age students), and as a way of helping to develop international linkages and increasing the international profile of all the degree scheme offerings.  This might include the provision of short courses for Continuing Professional Development in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g., CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis).  Doing so might also provide opportunities for other professionals, such as teachers, to update their skills and knowledge about creating a global society and building a healthier world. This would enhance the reputation of the School and simultaneously provide an income stream.

**Commendations**

5.7    The RG commends the School on mapping all of the undergraduate modules' learning outcomes to the programme outcome in order to offer students a fully outcome-based curriculum.

5.8    The RG commends the School's portfolio refreshment and postgraduate (Masters) level to rationalise and focus on areas of strength and/or where there are perceived market gaps in taught Masters offerings in the Irish Geography landscape.

**Recommendations**

5.9    The RG recommend further review of assessment strategies (including mapping of assessment to module learning outcomes at Masters level) similar to that undertaken at undergraduate level.

5.10    The RG recommend the School canvass advice about the best way to showcase and promote its programmes, including the naming of postgraduate taught programmes in a way that will best appeal to potential students.  This might involve making better use of alumni and other external networks.

5.11 Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders. (see also 2.19 above).

# 6. Research Activity

*General Comments and Context*

6.1 The RG found many areas of excellence in research within the School. Key actions were set down in the 2015 School Strategic Plan to increase the quality, quantity and impact of research and this appears to have been paying dividends. The SAR lists various metrics and comparative statistics that highlight how the School is now well placed across a range of UCD KPIs (e.g. by publication volume, field weighted citation index, research awards etc.) and also highlights the extensive international collaborations and strong track record of research funding. Postgraduate support and training appear to be sound with gender-balanced opportunities being provided for PhD students to gain tutoring/lecturing experience, and PhD completion rates being steady (since 2015, 8 candidates (4 male, 4 female) have completed their PhD. Nevertheless, there are some areas for improvement and for better sharing of best practice across and beyond the School, and for mentoring and guidance of junior staff by more senior/established staff.

6.2 A sabbatical (research leave) system is in operation, which is challenging to manage from a teaching/administration point of view, given the small numbers of staff and the fact that other requests for extended leave (paid teaching replacement) may also be granted. As reflected in the RG discussions with staff during the site visit, for many the benefits of the sabbatical system far outweigh the negatives, as it provides the essential time and space for academic staff to focus on research.

6.3 The SAR notes that following the publication of the UCD Research Strategy in spring 2021, the School is currently working on the development of a Research Strategy at School and College Committee level.

6.4 Current academic staff in the School speak about the administrative burden involved in keeping records for research funding that they have secured. Managing large, complex grants impacts on staff time and presents a substantial reputational and financial risk for individuals, the School and the wider institution if there is not adequate support /expertise available in procurement and policies, associated with large grant management.

**Commendations**

6.5     100% of School staff are engaged in research, and publishing quality outputs and attracting funding for research. Strong connections also exist through individual interdisciplinary research collaborations with internal and external colleagues in other disciplines.

6.6     A research culture appears to be embedded throughout the School, including in an interface with teaching and learning activities.

6.7     The metrics that have been compiled to benchmark research performance are all very sound (if not excellent in many respects), as reflected in the number of quality publications, grant awards, international collaborations, leadership roles and other research activities.

6.8     In line with wider trends in the University sector in Ireland and the UK, in recent years many staff have been engaging in research outreach activities and seeking to have potential 'impact' beyond the traditional university target audiences. With new staff appointments, the School has strengthened research links with the Teagasc Walsh Fellowship Programme and enhanced networking with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI).

6.9     A number of academic staff contribute as guest editors on international journals (e.g. EPS, Sexualities, International Journal for Critical Geographies, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Water Journal, Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal) and senior academics in the School sit on funding decision panels (e.g. ERC Panel Chair, Geosciences and Geographical Sciences Royal Irish Academy Chair, Social Sciences Division, Academia Europea Executive Member, Norwegian Research Council Research Grants Board Member, University of Amsterdam Research Evaluator for Social Sciences and Humanities, British Ocean Sediment Core Research Facility Advisory Panel Member, invited research proposal Reviewer/Assessor for the International Foundation for Science, Sweden).

6.10    The RG commend the sabbatical leave system, which while challenging to manage from a teaching/administration point of view, provides time and space for staff to focus on quality research.  It is commendable the School is working to formalise a sabbatical policy using UCD's Research Sabbatical Leave policy for guidance.


**Recommendations**

6.11    There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the post-award area when large grants have been secured.  The SAR refers to enhancing in-house support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively.

6.12    The RG recommends specific targets should be set for staff availing of sabbatical leave that are appropriate to career stage, particularly with a view to prioritising the quality (rather than necessarily the quantity) of outputs/activities.   A focus should be placed on the outputs/activities that really require dedicated time (e.g. the large, agenda-setting review paper, or the large grant application). When staff return from sabbatical leave, feedback on their sabbatical achievements needs to be shared more widely within the School, for instance, in the form of a research seminar or a freely-available report. This will help ensure transparency and enable sharing of learnings/best practice.

6.13    The RG recommends a more strategic approach for staff wishing to compete for research-oriented academic leadership positions, especially in key subject-related organisations in Ireland or overseas (e.g. Geographical Society of Ireland, Quaternary Research Association, International Geographical Union, International Association of Geomorphologists).   The external research landscape is constantly shifting, and 'horizon scanning' and improved guidance for newly appointed staff (especially more junior staff) from more established colleagues (e.g. through the recommended formal mentoring process – see 3.16) would be helpful for individual and collective benefit.

6.14    Much teaching, learning and research by School staff (and UCD's Earth Institute) is aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The RG recommends that the School align themselves with UCD's Sustainability Report that outlines a structured programme designed to embed the UN SDGs across education, research, governance and engagement activities. The  School are well placed to help shape this agenda and other strands of UCD's Strategic Objectives and also to leverage the engagement as a marketing/promotion tool.

## 7. Management of Quality and Enhancement

*General Comments and Context*

7.1    The School monitors the quality of its academic programmes using formal student evaluation through the University module feedback system and curriculum meetings.

7.2    The School have engaged in a detailed curriculum review, reassessing module offerings, developing fieldwork opportunities, revising assessment strategies and linking teaching more fully to the SDGs. This latter point is key to showcasing and developing Geography's contribution to advancing research and teaching of relevance to both global concerns and local needs in the form of the new DN240 offering and intake and UCD's Rising to the Future strategy. The key pillars of this strategy of creating a sustainable global society, transforming through digital technology, building a healthy world and empowering humanity; are all objectives that are addressed through the School's curricula.

7.3     The RG understood the School are in the process of establishing a Staff-Student Consultative Committee to provide a forum for receiving and responding to student feedback. The RG welcomes this initiative and see also an opportunity to incorporate both undergraduate and postgraduate matters.   An additional committee may contribute further to calendar congestion but such a committee will aid greatly with communication, particularly by raising the 'student voice' and 'closing the feedback loop', and by ensuring consistency of message between staff and students.  If the student representatives' roles are carefully explained and the CV benefits for the students are highlighted (e.g. that they will act as ambassadors for their cohorts), then this may bring many benefits. Combining the undergraduate and postgraduate committees in one meeting has time saving benefits, and postgraduates that have been through the UCD system can contribute to problem diagnoses by commenting on their experience of undergraduate issues and potential solutions.

7.4     A structured moderation practice is in place that requires each staff member to moderate the work of colleagues across 3 to 4 modules, the latter facilitating peer review and support and feedback.

7.5     The RG noted the low uptake of the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning at the time of the review, only one staff member has taken the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning. The RG regards the certificate as an opportunity to help ensure the sharing of best practice both within the School and between the School and other schools and colleges, benefit individuals in terms of future promotion opportunities, provide opportunities for showcasing the School's teaching and learning credentials, reduce the number of assessments and ensure the use of standard marking criteria and standard feedback forms for each type of assessment.

7.6     On this latter point, regular external examiner reports and some senior academic staff emphasise that some modules are over-assessed, and that in some cases assessments have no standard marking criteria and/or no standard feedback forms. Feedback from some of the students that the RG met with also highlighted challenges with respect to the volume, consistency and timing of assessments.

7.7     As part of the Athena Swan application in 2022/23 the School plans to review its gender and diversity and also undertake further analysis of its PhD completion rates. For example, the SAR notes completion speed has varied between 4 and 6 years.

7.8     The RG understood in their discussions that there can be challenges with the timely processing of student applications for masters' programmes.

**Commendations**

7.9     The RG commends the School for establishing the new Staff-Student Consultative Committee, which will help support the School in gathering additional feedback from students.

7.10    The RG commends the School for its contribution to advancing research and teaching of relevance to both global concerns and local needs in the form of the new DN240 offering and intake and UCD's Rising to the Future strategy.

7.11    The School is to be commended for its continued delivery of its full complement of programmes and maintaining quality throughout the COVID pandemic, transiting to online learning approaches literally overnight.

7.12    Feedback from students (past and present) suggests that students value and enjoy the modules and programmes offered by the School.

7.13    The School offers open access to around 18 modules, which directly addresses equality of access and diversity and inclusion.

**Recommendations**

7.14    The RG recommends that more staff (especially, but not exclusively, newly appointed staff) should be encouraged to take up the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning.

7.15    The RG recommends that the recently established Staff-Student Consultative Committee clearly outlines student representatives' roles.

7.16    The RG recommends that the School review and ensure a more timely applications process that would be more responsive to the future needs of students and also help with marketing activities.

7.17    Responsibility for oversight of Teaching and Learning within the School needs to consider both undergraduate and graduate programmes. This would ensure that emphasis is also placed on developing and promoting postgraduate taught programmes, as well as ensuring timely applications and be responsive to the future needs of students.

## 8. Support Services

*General Comments and Context*

8.1    The School benefits from support services from the University including UCD Registry, College Programme Office, College Liaison librarian, Student Advisor, UCD Access and Lifelong learning, UCD Estates and UCD Human Resources.

8.2    The implementation of the new 4-year Bachelor of Social Sciences programme has required a lot of cooperation at College level to successfully roll out the programme.

8.3    In the course of their discussions, the RG noted that students undertaking fieldwork activities/placements were not always fully aware of the additional costs involved in their particular programme when registering for their programme.

8.4    School academic staff identified variations in the availability of teaching and learning facilities to deliver blended learning.

**Commendations**

8.5     The School benefits from strong support services within the University, including the College of Social Science and Law, UCD Libraries (James Joyce, Health Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Richview, and Blackrock Libraries), IT Services and the UCD Research Office. Other support includes the College Principal, UCD Research and Innovation the finance manager, HR partner, Library, Estates and Access and Lifelong Learning.

8.6     Through discussion with the various stakeholders who met with the RG, the School is clearly held in high regard by all those who interact with it.

**Recommendations**

8.7     The School should continue to seek to benefit from the College's ongoing marketing support for Masters programmes.

8.8     In ensuring that students are fully aware of any additional costs, the RG recommend these are made more explicit. For example, provision of information on the School's website and during programme registration, and also by additional reminders at the time of module registration. The School have specific flyers for each Masters programmes and where fieldwork is required/offered as part of each programme, it would be useful to highlight the additional cost on these flyers.

8.9     The School should seek to engage with UCD Estates to understand the availability of lecture capture facilities in teaching spaces and other related support.


# 9. External Relations

*General Comments and Context*

9.1     The School maintains collegial relationships with colleagues in other Geography departments in Ireland and the United Kingdom, while there are particularly strong, long standing research linkages with colleagues at Maynooth University, TCD, and DCU School of History and Geography. Staff also contribute academic service to other geography departments in Ireland including serving on interview panels, external examination, academic co-supervision or research panel membership, and provision of guest lectures.

9.2     The RG found the School has clear evidence of interdisciplinary research collaborations with internal and external colleagues in other disciplines, including many UCD Schools (e.g. Earth Sciences, Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy, Medicine, Archaeology, Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore, and Agriculture and Food Science), and TCD School of Histories and Humanities.

9.3    Staff are actively engaged in a range of community and public engagement and media outreach activities aligned with their diverse specialisations in Geography. Strong community engagement activities have stemmed from participatory research collaborations. An excellent example is the ongoing collaboration between the School, the not-for-profit group, A Playful City, and Sean Harrington Architects to bring ideas for creating more playful, engaging, and inclusive cities with and for communities to new audiences through publications, dialogue with policymakers and practice-based learning for postgraduate students.

9.4    Other collaborative projects centred around urban challenges include work on community-led urban green infrastructure planning with the Common Ground the non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Dublin 8, and Threshold national housing charity with the Robert Emmet Community Development Project. A project with the Dundrum 2030 Community Group has recently led to the development of a Community SDG Dashboard.

9.5    The School has a national and international ethos. The School offers innovative educational activities and fieldtrips that involve collaborations with external universities or agencies. An example is the International Urban Fieldwork Masters module to London, which is run in collaboration with the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL).

9.6    The School have also developed a range of collaborative teaching and educational links that include partnerships with other universities that enable student (all levels, including master and PhD) and academic staff exchanges. (Examples include the Erasmus+ programme, Study Abroad and U21 and the Erasmus+ ICM and Erasmus Mundus Action Programmes).

9.7    The Global South Fieldwork: Vietnam Masters module is taught through a 2-week field class to Vietnam, supported by an Irish Aid Vietnam-Ireland Bilateral Higher Education (VIBE) programme on climate change vulnerabilities and adaptation in the northern upland region of Vietnam. The field class comprises joint fieldwork activities undertaken between UCD Geography students and staff together with project partner staff and students at Hanoi University and Thai Nguyen University. Preparatory activities include in-class meetings and field trips, as well as meetings with Irish Aid and other development organisations (United Nations Development Programme and UN Women).

9.8    Academic staff have membership of national and international professional associations and advisory capacities in the public sector such as *Advisor (*British Ocean Sediment Core Research Facility), *Representative (*EuroPlaNet Ireland, the International Union for Quaternary Research, the World Meterological Organisation, International Association for Urban Climates, International Association of Cryospheric Sciences, and National LGBT Federation  (NXF) representative (an LGBT NGO research committee), *Elected member (*Royal Irish Academy, Executive Board of the Spanish Association for Environmental Impact Assessment, International Association for Impact Assessment, and Academia Europea); *Appointed member* (Royal Irish Academy Committee, National Open Research Forum to drive the Irish agenda for Open Research); and *Chair (*Royal Irish Academy, Geosciences and Geographical Sciences Committee Chair and Open Science Steering Group Chair).

9.9     The RG noted that industry representatives were providing some focused academic modules on certain programmes (e.g. INFOMAR, a DECC-funded joint programme between the Geological Survey Ireland and the Marine Institute that is undertaking an Irish marine seabed mapping project).

9.10    Approximately 50% of the research outputs in the School are collaborative, both internally and externally to the School.

9.11    The School have recognised the need to gather information on employment of their graduates and need to enhance contacts with employers. The School Communications & Engagement Committee is working with UCD Alumni on a graduate career tracking initiative. In collaboration with the Geography Society, the School holds an annual Masters Alumni Career Panels to help showcase to current and prospective students the career pathways of students. This has taken place once so far and seems to have had a good attendance.

**Commendations**

9.12    The RG commends the School on the positive reputation that it has established with external stakeholders (alumni and employers).  This positive reputation and sense of goodwill was very evident in the RG discussions cv undertaken as part of the review.

9.13    UCD is attractive to international students, including many who want to enrol on specific Master's programmes and undertake PhD research.

9.14    The RG commend the School for the range of public sector engagement and contributions undertaken by staff including advisory roles with Dublin City Council, and local County Council Heritage Forums; advisory with NASA and the European Space Agency; research partnerships and projects aimed to inform policy-making with Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies in Ireland and Office of the Planning Regulator, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and research advisory on ethnic minority groups in Vietnam for the Department of Foreign Affairs Australian Government (Gender Responsive and Equitable Agriculture and Tourism programme). Employers that formed part of the RG's interview groups were very positive towards the School.

**Recommendations**

9.15    More alumni could be invited to meet with undergraduate students for career advice, and more opportunities to bridge the gap with industry should be established by having more external visits.  Doing so will help to embed employability more strongly and explicitly into the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

9.16    An industry advisory panel made up of employers, industry experts and staff from the School could be established to explore where there is a need for new programmes (e.g. Masters, CPD courses) and the deliberations could feed into the market research and business case for developing new Masters and promoting existing ones.  For instance, given the links between academic experts in the School and their external networks, there is the opportunity for some unique perspectives to be offered in the development of new programmes or CPD activities. For example, expertise in digital geographies, GIS and social justice, GIS and global health could be leveraged to offer something unique to UCD.

9.17    The School could consider how best to further showcase and leverage their public and international engagement and embed this in their teaching.

## UCD School of Geography – 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 Geography 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)*

## Organisation and Management of Resources

*General Comments and Context*

**Commendations**

2.16    The School has a strong recognition externally and is ranked in the top 100 Schools in QS subject rankings. The School currently is ranked no. 1 in Ireland and is situated between 101 and 150 in the 2021 QS World University Rankings for Geography. The staff are all very dedicated and clearly committed.

2.17    All faculty, professional and technical staff that met with the RG were clearly engaged, collaborative and collegial in their engagements as a School and more widely with College and University strategic objectives.

**Recommendations**

2.18    The School should consider undertaking further review of module provision at postgraduate level and look at possibilities for consolidation of pathways, particularly where there are very low numbers of students on modules.

2.19    To address low student uptake, the RG recommends also considering the name of the Masters' programmes and if they are sufficiently clear to the markets they wish to attract (e.g. should the name of the MSc in Geospatial Data Analysis be changed to MSc in 'Geographic Information Systems' or incorporate the term 'Geodata'?). Using a globally recognised name may enable the programmes to be found by more prospective students (e.g. in a Google search). (see also 5.11 below)

2.20    The RG recommend the development of a School succession plan for academics in respect of leadership roles.

# 3. Staff and Facilities

**Commendations**

3.11    The School should be commended for rebalancing diversity in gender in recent years through strategic hires.

**Recommendations**

3.12    As the School has highlighted the heavy administrative burden with committees, research funding etc., consideration needs to be given as to whether five staff members are necessary on the taught Graduate Committee, and perhaps reduce this in line with how other Schools in the College are represented on this committee.

3.13    The RG recommend a review of the workload model operating in the School.

3.14    Feedback from PhD students highlighted that their designated study space is valued and the RG recommend this space be maintained.

3.15    The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example,  the Curriculum Management System.

3.16    Linked to 3.15 above, the RG recommends consideration also of a more formal mentorship programme (newly appointed and more junior faculty linked with more senior faculty) to assist those more junior staff to maintain and enhance their research, while also getting their teaching and administrative duties up and running.

3.17    The RG recommends consideration be given to incorporating marketing activities into the role of a designated administrative person to help promote the Masters' programmes, especially through consideration of naming/branding and statement of unique selling points. (see also 2.19 above).

## 4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

**Commendations**

4.8     All School staff are actively engaged with teaching and learning across the various programmes, both at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level. Many elements of teaching and learning are 'research informed' or 'research led' and so engaging students directly with the knowledge frontier in geography and allied subjects.

4.9     Good consideration has been given to developing pathways for progression through the various levels of the undergraduate programmes and, if applicable, through the Masters' programmes. This is evidenced in the SAR by the development of the MSc Critical Geographies and MSc Risk, Resilience & Sustainability. These umbrella offerings are designed to maximise staff input, offer students an opportunity to select from graduate modules across the curriculum and offer clear pathways for progression from current undergraduate programmes to these taught graduate offerings.

4.10    The RG commends the School for their contribution to the undergraduate programme in Sustainability (DN240).

4.11    There has been increasing emphasis on embedding subject-specific and transferable skills in the programmes, especially with a view to enhancing student employability. The introduction of fieldwork at every stage of the 4-year degree programme is to be commended.

**Recommendations**

4.12    The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address over-assessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload.

4.13    Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on hardcopy versus electronic comments on e-copy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences.

4.14    The RG recommends consideration be given to producing pedagogy-related publications, either for specialist geographical pedagogical journals and/or for publications or targeted at secondary school students taking geography or related subjects.  This provides opportunities for sharing of best practice, enhancing promotion applications, and improved marketing.

4.15    Within the parameters set by the University, and in liaison with the College, greater consideration could be given to combining the best elements of online provision with face-to-face provision, for pedagogical reasons, for equality, diversity and inclusivity (e.g. widening access) reasons, and also for marketing reasons. The RG recommends that the School develop a School Teaching and Learning strategy that is aligned with the University. For example, there could be more pre-recorded lectures where the basic topic content is delivered, and then face-to-face activities that are based around discussions of that content and/or active learning exercises that apply the content.

4.16    The School could benefit from ensuring all students undertaking research are fully aware of UCD ethical approval dates and the associated requirement for timely documentation submission. This will facilitate approval in a timely manner and enable students to commence their research.

## 5. Curriculum Development and Review

**Commendations**

5.7    The RG commends the School on mapping all of the undergraduate modules' learning outcomes to the programme outcome in order to offer students a fully outcome-based curriculum.

5.8    The RG commends the School's portfolio refreshment and postgraduate (Masters) level to rationalise and focus on areas of strength and/or where there are perceived market gaps in taught Masters offerings in the Irish Geography landscape.

**Recommendations**

5.9    The RG recommend further review of assessment strategies (including mapping of assessment to module learning outcomes at Masters level) similar to that undertaken at undergraduate level.

5.10    The RG recommend the School canvass advice about the best way to showcase and promote its programmes, including the naming of postgraduate taught programmes in a way that will best appeal to potential students. This might involve making better use of alumni and other external networks.

5.11    Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders. (see also 2.19 above).

# 6. Research Activity

**Commendations**

6.5     100% of School staff are engaged in research, and publishing quality outputs and attracting funding for research. Strong connections also exist through individual interdisciplinary research collaborations with internal and external colleagues in other disciplines.

6.6     A research culture appears to be embedded throughout the School, including in an interface with teaching and learning activities.

6.7     The metrics that have been compiled to benchmark research performance are all very sound (if not excellent in many respects), as reflected in the number of quality publications, grant awards, international collaborations, leadership roles and other research activities.

6.8     In line with wider trends in the University sector in Ireland and the UK, in recent years many staff have been engaging in research outreach activities and seeking to have potential 'impact' beyond the traditional university target audiences. With new staff appointments, the School has strengthened research links with the Teagasc Walsh Fellowship Programme and enhanced networking with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI).

6.9     A number of academic staff contribute as guest editors on international journals (e.g. EPS, Sexualities, International Journal for Critical Geographies, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Water Journal, Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal) and senior academics in the School sit on funding decision panels (e.g. ERC Panel Chair, Geosciences and Geographical Sciences Royal Irish Academy Chair, Social Sciences Division, Academia Europea Executive Member, Norwegian Research Council Research Grants Board Member, University of Amsterdam Research Evaluator for Social Sciences and Humanities, British Ocean Sediment Core Research Facility Advisory Panel Member, invited research proposal Reviewer/Assessor for the International Foundation for Science, Sweden).

6.10    The RG commend the sabbatical leave system, which while challenging to manage from a teaching/administration point of view, provides time and space for staff to focus on quality research. It is commendable the School is working to formalise a sabbatical policy using UCD's Research Sabbatical Leave policy for guidance.

**Recommendations**

6.11    There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the post-award area when large grants have been secured. The SAR refers to enhancing in-house support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively.

6.12    The RG recommends specific targets should be set for staff availing of sabbatical leave that are appropriate to career stage, particularly with a view to prioritising the quality (rather than necessarily the quantity) of outputs/activities.    A focus should be placed on the outputs/activities that really require dedicated time (e.g. the large, agenda-setting review paper, or the large grant application). When staff return from sabbatical leave, feedback on their sabbatical achievements needs to be shared more widely within the School, for instance, in the form of a research seminar or a freely-available report. This will help ensure transparency and enable sharing of learnings/best practice.

6.13    The RG recommends a more strategic approach for staff wishing to compete for research-oriented academic leadership positions, especially in key subject-related organisations in Ireland or overseas (e.g. Geographical Society of Ireland, Quaternary Research Association, International Geographical Union, International Association of Geomorphologists).    The external research landscape is constantly shifting, and 'horizon scanning' and improved guidance for newly appointed staff (especially more junior staff) from more established colleagues (e.g. through the recommended formal mentoring process – see 3.16) would be helpful for individual and collective benefit.

6.14    Much teaching, learning and research by School staff (and UCD's Earth Institute) is aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The RG recommends that the School align themselves with UCD's Sustainability Report that outlines a structured programme designed to embed the UN SDGs across education, research, governance and engagement activities. The  School are well placed to help shape this agenda and other strands of UCD's Strategic Objectives and also to leverage the engagement as a marketing/promotion tool.

## 7. Management of Quality and Enhancement

**Commendations**

7.9     The RG commends the School for establishing the new Staff-Student Consultative Committee, which will help support the School in gathering additional feedback from students.

7.10    The RG commends the School for its contribution to advancing research and teaching of relevance to both global concerns and local needs in the form of the new DN240 offering and intake and UCD's Rising to the Future strategy.

7.11    The School is to be commended for its continued delivery of its full complement of programmes and maintaining quality throughout the COVID pandemic, transiting to online learning approaches literally overnight.

7.12    Feedback from students (past and present) suggests that students value and enjoy the modules and programmes offered by the School.

7.13    The School offers open access to around 18 modules, which directly addresses equality of access and diversity and inclusion.

**Recommendations**

7.14    The RG recommends that more staff (especially, but not exclusively, newly appointed staff) should be encouraged to take up the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning.

7.15    The RG recommends that the recently established Staff-Student Consultative Committee clearly outlines student representatives' roles.

7.16    The RG recommends that the School review and ensure a more timely applications process that would be more responsive to the future needs of students and also help with marketing activities.

7.17    Responsibility for oversight of Teaching and Learning within the School needs to consider both undergraduate and graduate programmes. This would ensure that emphasis is also placed on developing and promoting postgraduate taught programmes, as well as ensuring timely applications and be responsive to the future needs of students.


# 8. Support Services

**Commendations**

8.5    The School benefits from strong support services within the University, including the College of Social Science and Law, UCD Libraries (James Joyce, Health Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Richview, and Blackrock Libraries), IT Services and the UCD Research Office. Other support includes the College Principal, UCD Research and Innovation the finance manager, HR partner, Library, Estates and Access and Lifelong Learning.

8.6    Through discussion with the various stakeholders who met with the RG, the School is clearly held in high regard by all those who interact with it.

**Recommendations**

8.7    The School should continue to seek to benefit from the College's ongoing marketing support for Masters programmes.

8.8    In ensuring that students are fully aware of any additional costs, the RG recommend these are made more explicit. For example, provision of information on the School's website and during programme registration, and also by additional reminders at the time of module registration. The School have specific flyers for each Masters programmes and where fieldwork is required/offered as part of each programme, it would be useful to highlight the additional cost on these flyers.

8.9     The School should seek to engage with UCD Estates to understand the availability of lecture capture facilities in teaching spaces and other related support.

# 9. External Relations

**Commendations**

9.12    The RG commends the School on the positive reputation that it has established with external stakeholders (alumni and employers).  This positive reputation and sense of goodwill was very evident in the RG discussions cv undertaken as part of the review.

9.13    UCD is attractive to international students, including many who want to enrol on specific Master's programmes and undertake PhD research.

9.14    The RG commend the School for the range of public sector engagement and contributions undertaken by staff including advisory roles with Dublin City Council, and local County Council Heritage Forums; advisory with NASA and the European Space Agency; research partnerships and projects aimed to inform policy-making with Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies in Ireland and Office of the Planning Regulator, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and research advisory on ethnic minority groups in Vietnam for the Department of Foreign Affairs Australian Government (Gender Responsive and Equitable Agriculture and Tourism programme). Employers that formed part of the RG's interview groups were very positive towards the School.

**Recommendations**

9.15    More alumni could be invited to meet with undergraduate students for career advice, and more opportunities to bridge the gap with industry should be established by having more external visits.  Doing so will help to embed employability more strongly and explicitly into the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

9.16    An industry advisory panel made up of employers, industry experts and staff from the School could be established to explore where there is a need for new programmes (e.g. Masters, CPD courses) and the deliberations could feed into the market research and business case for developing new Masters and promoting existing ones.  For instance, given the links between academic experts in the School and their external networks, there is the opportunity for some unique perspectives to be offered in the development of new programmes or CPD activities. For example, expertise in digital geographies, GIS and social justice, GIS and global health could be leveraged to offer something unique to UCD.

9.17    The School could consider how best to further showcase and leverage their public and international engagement and embed this in their teaching.

# UCD School of Geography
# Response to the Review Group Report

The task of developing the Self-assessment Report was a valuable reflective exercise, which facilitated the School to review its position from a number of perspectives, highlight and confirm our strengths and opportunities, identify areas of good practice and evaluate our weaknesses and challenges in a systematic way. The Review Group Site Visit was a positive and constructive experience. We welcome the endorsement of the Review Group for our activities through commendations and will carefully consider the recommendations during the Quality Improvement Planning process.

There was a high level of engagement from all staff categories and from the student community, both in compiling the Self-assessment Report and in interacting with the Review Group during the site visit. The School wishes to thank the Review Group for their time, expertise and constructive comments, both at the visit and in their helpful Report.

We will formulate a plan to address the recommendations in the Quality Review Report, and actions are already underway. These include addressing the issues identified with the School's postgraduate (Masters) offerings' names and module consolidation; strategy to better promote our taught offerings; refreshing our sabbaticals policy; alignment of relevant modules with UCD's Sustainability report and the UN's SDGs; take up of the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning; improve the Staff-Student Consultative Committee; exploring industry stakeholders' involvement in Masters programmes design as relevant. These changes will significantly benefit the School and its outputs.

With specific reference to the prioritised recommendations identified by the Review Group, the School's initial proposals/comments are outlined below:

1.  **The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example, the Curriculum Management System. (3.15)**

    Proposals/comments: We will put this into practice this year as we will welcome three new academic hires. The School Manager, administrator and academic staff as relevant could do this training.

2.  **The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address over assessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload. (4.12)**

    Proposals/comments: This has already been started, with an all-School review of over-assessment in June 2022. It is an issue that the School will continue monitoring while implementing changes accordingly.

3.  **Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on hardcopy versus electronic comments on e-copy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences. (4.13)**

    Proposals/comments: This recommendation will be dealt with in the School's Teaching & Learning Committee.

4.  **Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in  GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders.(5.11)**

    Proposals/comments: Yes, CPD in GIS or drones are issues that will be explored in the coming year, and which have been on the radar for some time now. The School is already running a summer drone school and should build on that to offer CPDs in drone and GIS/remote sensing if the needs analysis warrants it.

5.  **There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the post-award area when large grants have been secured.  The SAR refers to enhancing in-house support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively. (6.11)**

    Proposals/comments: Yes, the College and UCD Research Innovation and Impact (UCDRII) are aware of this, and UCDRII has already made statements to this effect. The School will actively liaise with the College and UCDRII in order to obtain the supports that are realistic and possible to resource.

**UCD School of Geography**

**Quality Review Site Visit: 11-14 April 2022**

**TIMETABLE**

| Monday 11 April 2022 | |
|---|---|
| 12.30-13.30 | Private meeting of Review Group |
| 13.30-14.15 | 3.2 Head of School |
| 14.15-14.45 | Review Group only – Key observations & break |
| 14.45-15.30 | 3.3 Discussion of Finances - Head of School, School Manager, CFM |
| 15.30-16.00 | Review Group only – Key observations & break |
| 16.00-16.30 | 3.4 Programme Dean/College Representatives |
| 16.30-16.45 | Review Group only – Key observations & wrap up |

| Tuesday 12 April 2022 | |
|---|---|
| 08.30-09.00 | Review Group only – private meeting |
| 09.00-09.30 | 4.1 College Principal |
| 09.30-10.30 | Review Group only – Key observations & break |
| 10.30-11.00 | 4.2 Session with VP for Research or nominee |
| 11.00-11.30 | Review Group only – Key observations & break |
| 11.30-12.30 | 4.3 RG meet with representative group of faculty staff - primary focus on research activities |
| 12.30-13.15 | Review Group only – Key observations & break for lunch |
| 13.15-14.00 | 4.4 Representative group of Undergraduate students |
| 14.00-14.30 | Review Group only – Key observations & break |
| 14.30-15.15 | 4.5 Representatives of Research and Taught Postgraduate students, Recent Graduates |
| 15.15-16.15 | Key observations and break |
| 16.15 -17.15 | 4.6 RG meet with representative group of faculty staff – primary focus on Teaching and Learning and Curriculum issues |
| 17.15-17.45 | Key observations and wrap up |

| Wednesday 13 April 2022 | |
|---|---|
| 10.30-10.45 | Review Group prep |
| 10.45-11.30 | 5.2 School support service representatives (e.g. Health and Safety, Registry, Library, Student advisors or any key areas highlighted in the SAR) |
| 11.30-12.45 | Review Group only – Key observations. Report Drafting, Exit & break |
| 12.45-13.00 | Review Group only – prep |
| 13.00-14.00 | 5.4 External Stakeholder meeting e.g. Professional and accrediting bodies and placement partners; Employers/Alumni |
| 14.00-14.45 | Review Group only – Key observations & break for lunch |
| 14.45-15.30 | 5.5 Newly Appointed Staff |
| 15.30-16.15 | Key observations & report drafting & break |
| 16.15-16.30 | 5.6 Programme Dean |
| 16.30-16.45 | Key observations & wrap up |

| Thursday 14 April 2022 | |
|---|---|
| 09.30-10.00 | Review Group only meeting |
| 10.00-10.30 | 5.1 Professional Staff/Technical Staff |
| 10.30-11.00 | Review Group key observations and break |
| 11.00-11.30 | 5.3 Research Funded Staff |
| 11.30-15.00 | Report Drafting and final preparation for Exit Presentation RG take break for lunch break at agreed time during this slot |
| 15.00-15.15 | 6.1 Review Group feedback initial outline commendations and findings College Principal; UCD Director of Quality |
| 15.15-15.30 | Review Group prep for next |
| 15.30-15.45 | 6.2 Review Group feedback initial outline commendations and findings Head of School; UCD Director of Quality |
| 15.45-16.00 | Review Group only – final prep/ transition to exit |
| 16.00-16.30 | 6.3 Exit Presentation to all available School staff – Presentation of Initial key findings by the Review Group |
| 16.30-17.00 | Review Group only – Remote Site Visit close out & next steps |
| | |