



National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

BA in Fine Art

Programmatic Review

Quality Review Panel Report

Date of Review Visit
Date of Report Submission

24 February 2023
15 March 2023

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Executive Summary

This Quality Review of BA in Fine Art was undertaken in February 2023, as part of NCAD's Quality Review Framework and to meet the statutory requirements for Designated Awarding Bodies (UCD) and linked providers (Recognised College, the National College of Art and Design (NCAD)) as set out under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The findings are based on the self-assessment report, external examiners reports, module descriptors, other related documents shared with the peer review group and the interviews conducted with staff and students associated with the programme (refer to the meetings schedule below).

The BA in Fine Art (brief context) is delivered and managed by the School of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design, NCAD.

1. Key findings about the BA in Fine Art

The review panel has identified a number of key findings in relation to areas of good practice operating within the College and the School and key areas which the review panel wish to highlight as requiring future improvement at School level. The report sets out all observations, commendations and recommendations of the review panel in detail.

1.1. Commendations

The review panel identified a number of commendations, in particular:

- The Panel commends the Fine Art programme teams, Heads of Department and Head of School on the quality of the programme documentation which has been developed to a high standard.
- The Panel commends the staff and management in the broader context of NCAD in achieving financial stability, growth in numbers, improved processes, and a clear plan to upgrade the campus, following several years of intense challenge.
- The Panel commends the College's openness to new ideas and approaches, such as the extensive range of engagement with external stakeholders and collaboration as part of the Creative Futures Academy.
- The Panel was particularly impressed by the Studio+ model as a form of experiential learning and engagement with a broad range of external cultural and social partners.
- The Panel commends the BA Fine Art programme teams on their commitment to their students which was commented on frequently during the interaction with students.

- The Panel commends the NCAD BA Fine Art staff on their open and frank dialogue as they survey the embrace of change and experimentation over the last five years.
- The Panel commends the extensive drive by staff and management to maintain and build NCAD's reputation within national, European and International contexts.
- The Panel commends the strong staff team, their visible professional practice, their commitment, and caring attitude.
- The Panel applauds the decision of the review taking place onsite in Thomas Street and the tour of the facilities was very welcome in understanding the range of studio facilities and the potential for phased campus improvement.
- The Panel commends the College's attainment of the Bronze Athena Swan.

1.2. Recommendations for Future Improvement

The Review Panel would suggest that the following recommendations:

Having reviewed the documentation, had meetings with students, staff, external partners and management our key recommendations follow the context set out here:

- The current BA Fine Art model has gone through a period of exciting and experimental development.
- The decision, almost a decade ago, to change the long term 4-year BA Fine Art to a 3-year model had a significant impact on school numbers and impacted on the financial stability of the College.
- The development of the Studio+ as an additional year has proved to be very popular with 70% of students taking this option.
- The Studio+ development has allowed for students to access a wide variety of options and experiences both external and internal to the College.

1.2.1. The Panel recommends that serious consideration be given to the reconfiguration of BA Fine Art as a 4-year programme including the Studio + year-long component, as a timely and interesting development to empower students and grow the reputation, status and stability of the programme and the College.

1.2.2. The Panel recommends taking the following steps into consideration as part of this process:

- 1.1.2.1. A dedicated and inclusive working group to consider the structure of the new BA Fine Art across the four years.
- 1.1.2.2. Planning in advance in Year 2 towards students' choices and options within Studio+.

- 1.1.2.3. Streamline Studio+ options in terms of onsite, offsite, Erasmus, projects and CFA and other elements.
 - 1.1.2.4. Consider Final Year options in terms of the four Disciplines and/or alternate pathway/s.
 - 1.1.2.5. Consider the student's journey and the value of a core thread of connectivity through discipline choice or tutorial contact.
 - 1.1.2.6. Consider the academic standing of students who opt to step out after two or three years of study.
- 1.2.3. The Panel recommends the development of a 5-Year Plan for the BA in Fine Art to listen, gather, capture ambition, examine values and enablers for good practice.
 - 1.2.4. While the Panel applauds the attainment of the Bronze Athena Swan, we recommend setting up an EDI committee and working groups to examine issues including the curriculum in a changing demographic, staff and student recruitment, as well as promotion and retention. A process leading to an authentic College EDI Strategy.
 - 1.2.5. The Panel recommends developing a staff engagement strategy incorporating regular and reliable touch points. Staff engagement seeking to find shared understandings across the school and college would be of benefit where relevant.
 - 1.2.6. The Panel recommends a review of assessment strategy, learning from the best practice across the programme and designing a consistent approach that incorporates explicit mechanisms to ensure parity across cohorts.
 - 1.2.7. The Panel recommends consideration of high-level leadership such as a Senior Technical Officer/Manager to work with Heads of Schools around the question of access to technical resources and sustainability policies.
 - 1.2.8. Finally, the integration of the BA in Education with the Fine Art Programme was raised. Although this is outside the remit of this Panel, while we understand the operational complexity, the interweaving of students following differing tracks can also enrich the overall student experience.

2. Brief History and Context of the National College of Art and Design

The National College of Art & Design (NCAD) is Ireland's leading provider of art and design education. The NCAD campus on Thomas Street in Dublin's historic city centre is home to a community of 1,500 undergraduate, graduate and part-time students engaged in a wide range of study and research across the disciplines of Design, Education, Fine Art and Visual Culture. NCAD has been the most significant provider of Art & Design education in Ireland for over 250 years and is a Recognised College of University College Dublin.

2.1. Relationship to UCD

In 1996, the College became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland. In 2011, the College established a strategic Academic Alliance with UCD and is now a Recognised College of UCD under a Memorandum of Agreement. As a recognised college of UCD, UCD is the designated awarding body, the accrediting university for NCAD programmes. All NCAD programmes are subject to the UCD Academic Regulations.

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012, UCD must ensure that NCAD's ongoing quality enhancement of its activities meets the requirements of the Act. NCAD's Quality Assurance Procedures were approved by UCD's Academic Council Committee on Quality (ACCQ) in October 2016. In March 2017, UCD carried out an Institutional Review of NCAD. A second Institutional Review was carried out in October 2021.

2.2. NCAD structure

NCAD has four schools: Design, Education, Fine Art and Visual Culture, offering a range of educational opportunities from part-time classes to doctoral studies. The Eddie Murphy Library and the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) are part of NCAD and it is important to note that NIVAL is dedicated to the documentation of 20th and 21st century Irish visual art and design.

3. Introduction and Context

This Programmatic Quality Review was undertaken as part of NCAD's Quality Review Framework and to meet the statutory requirements for Designated Awarding Body, University College Dublin (UCD) and linked provider (Recognised College, the National College of Art and Design (NCAD)), as set out under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, namely to review the effectiveness of the linked provider's programmes.

This report presents the findings of the programmatic review of the BA in Fine Art. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how NCAD discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students by evaluating the effectiveness of its programmes or units.

The members of the Review Panel (RP), appointed by NCAD, were:

- **Mike Fitzpatrick, Dean of Limerick School of Art & Design/ Director of Cultural Engagement, Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Chair of the panel**
- Sara Greavu, Curator of Visual Arts, Project Arts Centre
- Professor Juan Cruz, Principal of Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh

3.1. Outline of the Programmatic Quality Review Process and Methodology

The constitution of the review panel (RP) was well structured to sustain the full range of appropriate expertise. At the preliminary meeting of the RP, it was decided that the group will work together as a group during the review visit and not assign any specific areas of responsibility to any individual member of the review panel. All members of the RP had opportunities to ask questions during the visit. The Quality and Academic Support Officer was in attendance during the review visit and took notes.

All members of the RP contributed to the writing of the report.

The key stages of the review process consist of the following elements:

1. Programme self-assessment, which includes the preparation of an analytical and reflective self-assessment report (SAR), which involves an internal and external consultation process within NCAD.
2. Review visit by the review panel on 24 February 2023- see the schedule below.
3. Production of a report by the review panel, in which recommendations are clearly set out and distinguished from the general findings.
4. Production by NCAD of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which addresses all recommendations and includes a timeline in respect of their implementation.
5. Publication of the review panel's report, NCAD's response to the report, the QIP.
6. Establishment and implementation of a clear and timely follow-up process in respect of any quality improvement recommendations, which may include publication of updates on progress.

The review panel visit schedule for 24 February visit:

Time	Subject of session	Participants
Academic Affairs Office		
9.00-9.15	Welcome, Management Team	Professor Philip Napier, Head of School of Fine Art Professor Sarah Glennie, Director, NCAD Professor Siún Hanrahan, Head of Academic Affairs
9.15-10.00	Head of School	Professor Philip Napier
10.00-10.15	Break and Panel Discussion	Panel
10.15-11.00	Current students	Current students of BA Fine Art
11.00-11.15	Break and Panel Discussion, Move	Panel
Director's Office		
11.15-12.00	Staff	Teaching staff and technicians for BA Fine Art
12.00-12.15	Break and Panel Discussion	Panel
12.15-1.00	External Stakeholders	Employers, placement facilitators, project supervisors
1.00-2.00	Lunch break and campus tour	Panel and Professor Napier

2.00-2.30	Panel discussion	Panel only
2.30-3.15	Graduates	Graduates of BA Fine Art
3.15-3.30	Break and Panel discussion, Move	Panel
Academic Affairs Office		
3.30-4.15	Heads of Department	Brian Hand, Head of Department of Sculpture Mark O'Kelly, Head of Department of Painting Catriona Leahy, (Acting) Head of Department of Print Sarah Durcan, Head of Department of Media
4.15-4.30	Break and panel discussion	Panel
4.30-5.00	Head of School	Professor Philip Napier
5.00-5.30	Panel Discussion, summary of findings	Panel
5.30-6.00	Present findings to Management Team	Professor Philip Napier, Head of School of Fine Art Professor Siún Hanrahan, Head of Academic Affairs Professor Sarah Glennie, Director, NCAD Members of BA Fine Art Staff
6.00	Finish	

3.2. Key areas of the review

This report written by the review panel on completion of their visit on 24 February 2023 covers their review of the main aspects addressed in the self-assessment report:

3.3. BA Fine Art Context and Brief

The context of the review of the BA in Fine Art comes at a very interesting moment in time. The advent of the open Studio+ one year that has been developed and employed over the last number of years and offers students opportunities to base themselves off campus and engage with a fluid number of options. Over 70% of students are currently taking this option. The Programme is College-wide so students from different schools and disciplines and institutions may be gathered together in different formations. After they return to the final year they then drop back into their discipline choices. This additional year is run separately to the BA Fine Art and yet is now a central part of the BA Fine Art experience.

Subsequent to this review the management and staff of the programme with its four departments of Media, Print, Painting and Sculpture will be considering the concept of Studio+ as an Opt Out option rather than an Opt In. Therefore, the consideration of the 4-year programme as a single entity will be more closely considered. The outcomes of the different years are quite specific and the tension of following a single specialisation and the plurality of the Studio+ will need to be examined.

3.4. Overview of BA Fine Art within NCAD

The Panel greatly benefited from the full and candid overview of NCAD by the Director and senior management received on the day of the visit, outlining the challenges and achievements over the past five years and outlining the journey from crisis to stability to growth that underpins the thinking behind the current 2019-2024 Strategy *Futures, Bold and Curious*. There is no doubt that the strategy and the policy decisions and actions that followed has had a significant effect on the BA Fine Art programme, particularly the development of Studio+ as a College-wide optional additional year. Likewise, securing funding to initiate the Creative Futures Academy across NCAD, IADT and UCD also unlocks change and creates opportunity. The Panel also gained understanding of the current developments and future plans on a tour of the facilities and studios led by the Head of School.

Commendation

1. The Panel very much welcomes the potential that Studio+ brings to the BA Fine Art as a college wide option and experiential platform for student development.
2. The Panel also commends the value that the Creative Futures Academy offers the students, the programme and the College
3. The Panel commends the inter-institutional collaboration of the Creative Futures Academy and the practical value offered such as the new nearby facilities and space that we witnessed on our tour.
4. The Panel commends the School of Fine Art's response and embrace of Studio+ and the wide range of options it offers to students.
5. The Panel welcomes the plans for phased building and facilities improvements and refurbishments over the coming years.

Recommendations

- 3.4.1. The Panel recommends that the School and the BA Fine Programme continue to embrace the concept of continuous development as the inherent goal of a contemporary art school.
- 3.4.2. The Panel recommends that the School and the BA Fine Programme play its role of interconnectivity across the College and in doing so broadening the possibilities for all students and especially with regard to technical facilities.
- 3.4.3. The Panel recommends that the staff and management work together continuing to incorporate the learnings of recent years and to reimagine the potential for combining interdisciplinarity and core discipline focus.

- 3.4.4. The Panel recommend that the School and BA Fine Art Programme reflect on the voices of students who were united in valuing the encouragement and support of offered by Tutors, and of the access to different experiences and opportunities offered in Studio+ and Erasmus and conscious of the walls that sometimes exist in attempting to move across departments and utilise facilities.
- 3.4.5. The connection between Studio+ and Final Year was raised a number of times and as it affects both the College and the programme. The Panel recommends an all-School approach to reflect on the expected outcomes of both years.
- 3.4.6. Staff noted the complexity and uncertainty of delivering Studio+ and that is to be expected in experimental mode. The Panel recommends some reflection of the Studio+ process to improve or adapt the experience for both students and staff.

4. Conclusion

The Panel fully endorses the BA Fine Art Programme and commends leadership and staff of the College, the Fine Art School and the Departments on guiding the programme through a period of challenge to a new period of innovation and growth. Much of the future development and potential now lies in the hands of the four teams working collaboratively with the interconnected staff in other Schools, the common First Year Studies, Studio+ and CFA to embed and refine the changes in practice that have evolved over the last four years.

The Panel wishes to thank the management, staff and students for their frank and honest engagement in the review process. As a panel we wish to sincerely thank NCAD for the invitation to carry out this process. Finally, we wholeheartedly endorse the academic quality of the programme and wish the team every success in their journey of continuous change and development.

The assembly of the BA Fine Art Self Assessment Report (SAR) has been a very useful and helpful exercise for the School of Fine Art. It has been possible to bring together many of the tests, pilots and developments that our BA Fine Art Programme has initiated, tested and evolved. Developments are noted at many moments and our report has been an alive capture of our process and progress. I am grateful to many colleagues in NCAD for their support in the assembly of the document and to our staff, student and stakeholder participants, who have provided valuable observations.

The alignment of our programme with the development of processes, resources framed in relation to the strategic direction of the College have created a transparent platform for all of us to have further vantage over the context of our work. Our further momentum and agility to respond to challenges and potentials arising in creative field is supported by the commendations and recommendations of our SAR panel. I am grateful for their scholarship and insight. The next number of years presents a new basis to prosper, based on actively responding to what is recommended in the Review Panel's Report. The recommendations align very closely with development we expect to enable in the next period and is welcome. Thus, we will formulate the Quality Improvement Plan to address and advance the recommendations with some matters already underway.

1.1. Commendations

The suite of commendations is very welcome. The scope of the comments recognises the commitment and skill of colleagues at all levels.

We are pleased with the panels support of the development of our programme and wider institutional developments that inflect and advance it's potential and traction.

1.2. Recommendations for Future Improvement

- 1.2.1 We regard the reconfiguration to a 4-year programme to be a vital matter of development. Our Teaching and Learning arrangements in this area through Studio+ provide an important basis for this aim and the rationale for other developments new to us.
- 1.2.2.1 We will enable a dedicated and inclusive group to further consider the new BA Fine Art across four years where this report and our QIP will be an important keel.
- 1.2.2.2 Advanced planning and communication to students and staff in relation to Studio+ roll out was accelerated this year and we anticipate this to be further consolidated in future.
- 1.2.2.3 Streamlining the options available will facilitate more effective shared knowledge in relation to students and staff. Platforming student achievement in relation to choice is key.
- 1.2.2.4 The emergence of students from a Studio+ year will place known and alternative expectations on the ability of Final Year to meet new aspects of student experience. We will examine this through a 4-year plan that creates appropriate development of our structures.

- 1.2.2.5 The development of a thread of connectivity for students and staff through study years is a helpful recommendation which we can enable in the short and mid-term as key.
- 1.2.2.6 The status of students who step out of the 4-year degree will be a matter of further scrutiny with greater understanding of the choices they make.
- 1.2.3 The development of a 5-year plan is a positive and welcome recommendation in relation to the BA Programme. The resource structures that support the programme are more clear than years previously leaving more time and clarity to develop and execute our further goals. The expansion of this plan to include postgraduate development based on an amount of engagement including the areas of benchmarking, internationalisation, programme timing and intensities are a related work in significant progress and roll out.
- 1.2.4 As framed, Athena Swan Bronze Award is an important step for NCAD. The work of the EDI Committee, a central College working group that relates to academic matters, student services, administration, HR, etc are framing the detailed work required in implementing our commitments over a phased period. We wish for and will work to see change in our School.
- 1.2.5 Developing a Staff Engagement Strategy is welcome and meets emergent work in relation to a More Effective Organisation manifesting in further regular and reliable touch points. Evolving staff engagement that propels Programme momentum with the arc of College Strategy will be a decisive contribution toward realising opportunity and responsibility that are emergent in a time of further professionalisation. School staff engagements that are generative, or information sharing, or curricular or staff developmental are being further enabled and supported by contemporary administrative practices and modernisation.
- 1.2.6 A Staff Assessment Strategy will be reviewed and emerge with new knowledge contributed to by practices across the Schools, and with contributions from the Teaching and Learning Officer. We wish to advance rather than reach back. We will continue to be informed by student feedback and the Quality Assurance frameworks we have in place.
- 1.2.7 The development of a Technical Manager is a NCAD centralised strategic consideration considered to unlock greater resource sharing for all students. The measured renewal, upgrading and advance of technical capacity and sharing has momentum, as demonstrated on the site visit and is currently concluding pilot initiatives. Responsibilities in relation to Health and Safety is ongoing work.
- 1.2.8. The observation here is helpful. The School of Fine Art has extended choices for students wishing to undertake our areas of study in combination with other Schools. This includes Education and Fine Art and Critical Cultures Our programmes retain a strong practice-based spine.
- 3.4.1 We undertake continuous development diligently with reviews, student fora, and feedback across a body of Quality Assurance processes. Ongoing teaching pilots and test of pedagogical processes have been a feature of responding to our

restless, contemporary fields of practice. We embrace blended approaches and the further organisation of our teaching materials and delivery. We work hard at our pastoral responsibilities.

- 3.4.2 & 3.4.3 There are emergent exemplars of resource sharing and collegial knowledge sharing of breadth and depth that are to be built upon.
- 3.4.4 We welcome the positive voice of students in our ongoing efforts to enable Studio+, Erasmus and Internship opportunity and future support for student engagement with facilities and resources meaningfully.
- 3.4.5 Connecting Studio+ and Final Year is a critical facet of our development and improvement ahead. An all-School approach will inform how we decisively enable this and the endorsement of the Panel is a valuable voice in supporting this necessary, interesting and innovative work that will require further staff and structural agility.
- 3.4.6 A significant amount of work is in play in informing staff and students about the work and development of Studio+. As noted there is some complexity - that can be simplified. Updating knowledge as part of staff development and experience as part of our shared contemporary delivery now and for the future is required of all staff.

Professor Philip Napier
Head of the School of Fine Art
NCAD