NCAD DUBLIN

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

BA Product Design & BA Interaction Design

Programmatic Review 2021

Review Panel Report

Contents

1. Executive Summary

This Quality Review of BA Product Design and BA Interaction Design was undertaken in June 2021, 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.

It is important to note that this review was undertaken during the COVID-19 restrictions. The findings are based on the Self-Assessment Report, the interviews conducted via zoom (refer to the meetings schedule below), external examiners' reports, modular descriptors, and other related documents shared with the peer review group.

The BA in Product Design and BA in Interaction Design programmes are delivered and managed by the Department of Product Design in the School of Design at the National College of Art and Design, NCAD.

1.1. Key findings

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.

Summary of Commendations

The Review Panel identified a number of commendations, in particular:

1. It was clear that a significant amount of work and time was invested into preparations of the review including the Self-Assessment Report.

2. The School's entry options strategy allows students with diverse interests to enter the programmes.

3. Common Year 1 programme is a very positive experience for most of the students with its interdisciplinary aspects and also at a personal level.

4. There is an exceptionally strong studio and workshop culture due to highly-committed faculty and technical staff.

5. Overall the student feedback indicates a very high level of student satisfaction with both the faculty and with technical staff.

6. The faculty includes a large number of diverse and talented members.

7. There are highly dedicated leaders at all levels of the College, School and the Department.

8.   There is a drive to promote research across the two programmes with a number of research-active faculty.

9.   The newly introduced Studio+ option is seen as a great improvement at programme and school level.

10.   Internships are greatly appreciated by the students.

11.   External collaborations work very well.

12.   The Department's philosophy of 'learning to learn' is a great move, which helps to overcome the issue about software skills that students are very keen to learn by allowing students to learn by themselves. However, the philosophy must be explained clearly to the students at the outset to help them understand the department's approach.

Summary of Recommendations

The Review Panel would suggest the following recommendations:

1.   The Department of Product Design should establish a Teaching and Learning Committee to address the following issues:

1.1.   Programme structure and workload balance (Year 2 in particular).

1.2.   There is a fear that the most of the programme-specific learning outcomes are obtained in Year 2 and in the Final Year.

1.3.   Support for students who decide not to take the option year (Studio +) to equip them with the necessary skills to complete the Final Year with comparable standard.

1.4.   To find ways to minimise the disadvantage for students who decided not to take the al year (Studio +). Currently, they will be competing with the students who are in their fourth year of education due to the optional year. However, it is noted that most of the students decide to take the optional year.

1.5.   Explore options to overcome this unbalanced Final Year degree calculations for the students who took the optional year in comparison to others who decided not to take the optional year.

1.6.   Clarity on common entry vs direct entry: potential applicants need to be informed in advance about how the programme in Year 1 is structured.

1.7.   Explore how to better support students taking internships in Europe through Erasmus+, traineeship funds, work placements and internships etc.

1.8.   Explore ways to give access for all students to use all departmental studios within the College. The interdisciplinarity is a great asset of NCAD, but is under-utilised.

2. Explore opportunities to develop more external collaborations.

3. Staffing: Clear progression path to be outlined.

4. Human-centred design: Is it still valid? Investigate other valid criteria, for example Environment.

5. Interaction Design - explore more the area of emerging technologies to inform the students about current and future needs and the skills to adapt.

6. Introduction of Business of Design to the programme is a good start as recommended by the Institutional Quality Review Panel in 2017. However, it needs to be developed further.

7. The faculty, and the departmental head in particular, need more administrative support to ensure smooth running of the programmes.

2.   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 Product Design and BA in Interaction Design, in the Department of Product Design, within the School of Design at NCAD. 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.

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

- **Daniel Sudhershan**, Assistant Professor, UCD - School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy, Chair of the panel

- **Muireann McMahon**, Lecturer, University of Limerick

- **Peter Sheehan**, Peter Sheehan Studio (Former Director & Partner at Design Partners)

- **Trevor Hogan**, Lecturer and Co-ordinator for the BA in Creative Digital Media at Munster Technological University, Crawford College of Art & Design

- **Claire Dowling**, Creative Director at Deloitte Digital

2.1. Outline of the Programmatic Quality Review Process and Methodology

The constitution of the Review Panel (RP) was well structured with the full range of appropriate expertise included. The review visit was conducted virtually using Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. At the preliminary meeting of the RP, it was decided that the group would 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 panel requested an additional meeting with the Head of Department of Product Design and it was accommodated. The Quality and Academic Support Officer was in attendance during the review visit and in RP meetings to keep a record.

All members of the RP contributed to the writing of the report. The department had an opportunity to check the report for any factual errors before submitting the report to the Office of Academic Affairs.

The Review Panel is grateful to the management, staff and the students for their willing

co-operation and their involvement during the review process.

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

- 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.

- Review visit (virtual) by the Review Panel on 22 June 2021 - see the schedule below.

- Production of a report by the Review Panel, in which recommendations are clearly set out and distinguished from the general findings.

- Production by NCAD of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which addresses all recommendations and includes a timeline in respect of their implementation.

- Publication of the Review Panel's report and NCAD's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

- 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 Tuesday 22 June 2021

Time	Subject of session	Participants
9.00-9.30	Welcome	Panel, Kilian
9.30-10.00	Management Team	Panel, Siun, Alex, Sam, Mary Avril, Kilian
10.00-10.30	Introduction, virtual tour and programme overview	Panel, Sam, Kilian
10.30-11.00	Panel discussion	Panel, Kilian
11.00-11.30	Break	
11.30-12.00	Current students	Panel, students, Kilian
12.00-12.30	Teaching staff & technicians	Panel, staff, Kilian
12.30-1.00	External stakeholders	Panel, external stakeholders, Kilian
1.00-2.00	Lunch break	
2.00-2.30	Panel discussion	Panel only, (Kilian)
2.30-3.00	Graduates	Panel, graduates, Kilian
3.00-3.30	Panel discussion	Panel only, (Kilian)
3.30-3.45	Break	
3.45-4.15	Senior staff	Panel, Sarah, Siún, Alex, Mary Avril, Sam, Kilian
4.15-5.00	Panel discuss report summary	Panel only, (Kilian)
5.00-5.30	Present findings to Management Team	Panel, Sarah, Alex, Sam, Mary Avril, Siun, Kilian, JP, Angela

2.2. Key areas of the review

This report, written by the Review Panel on completion of their virtual visit on 22 June 2021 covers their review of the main aspects addressed in the self-assessment report:

- Relationship of the programmes to the School and College
- Programme aims and objectives
- Programme planning and organisation
- Staffing
- Delivery - learning and teaching
- Assessment
- Resources
- Student feedback
- Previous reports from external examiners

2.3. 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 (UCD).

2.4. 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.

2.5. 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 Edward 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.

2.6. Programmes being reviewed

The School of Design is one of four schools within the College, the other schools being Education, Fine Art and Visual Culture. The Product Design Department, part of NCAD's School of Design, provides two closely-related undergraduate programmes: BA in Product Design and BA in Interaction Design. Both programmes share common resources, such as staff, studios and physical resources, and share the common structure of the undergraduate programmes (common to all eight Design undergraduate programmes). NCAD's Quality Office chose to organise one combined quality assurance review for both of the above mentioned programmes. The peer review group agreed fully with this decision.

The brief description of the programme as stated by the School:

BA in Product Design

Product Design is about shaping the world around us. Most objects, from toys to medical devices and from furniture to consumer electronics are subject to product design. This is possible because product design is a versatile process that can be applied to many different contexts. At its core, product design is about understanding people and how they experience and interact with their surroundings. This kind of training enables graduates to help make the world a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable place.

Studying Product Design at NCAD will enable you to develop your skills within a creative art school environment, underpinned by technical expertise and extensive links with industry. The programme is delivered primarily within the design studio. The small size of each year group, coupled with close and frequent contact with the tutors, creates an informal yet highly effective student-led learning environment. Product Design has been taught at NCAD since 1976, and has developed a strong international reputation for producing graduates whose common strengths lie in the creation of innovative designs, products and services.

BA in Interaction Design

From apps and websites to connected products and wearable technologies, Interaction Design is about designing the way people communicate and interact at home, work or play. Interaction designers explore the relationship between people and technology to design digital products, apps, user experiences and services. Interaction designers create the future, and shape the digital products of tomorrow.

Studying Interaction Design at NCAD will enable you to develop your skills within a creative art and design school environment, underpinned by technical expertise and extensive links

with industry. The small size of each year group, coupled with close and frequent contact with the tutors, creates an informal yet highly effective learning environment. The curriculum exposes students to a wide range of topics, ranging from user experience (UX) design, to app and web design, to service design, to interactive digital products, experiences and installations. It is built around a core belief in human-centred design, with students developing the research and innovation skills that will allow them to design meaningful and desirable digital products.

2.7. Programmes' relationship with the School of Design and the College

The School of Design is one of four schools within the College, the other schools being Education, Fine Art and Visual Culture.

Within the School of Design, there are three departments:

- **Product Design** (BA and MA Product Design, BA and MA Interaction Design, MSc Medical Device Design and MA Service Design) - Head of Department: Sam Russell

- **Communication Design** (BA Graphic Design, BA Illustration, BA Moving Image Design and MA Communication Design) - Head of Department: John Paul Dowling

- **Design for Body and Environment** (BA Fashion Design, BA Jewellery & Objects, BA Textile & Surface Design and MA Design for Body & Environment) - Head of Department: Angela O'Kelly

Doctoral students are supported by the School of Design, often in partnership with the School of Visual Culture.

The School of Design offers eight undergraduate programmes and all eight programmes share an overarching common structure. All undergraduate programmes share one common first year programme.

Commendations

1. The common entry option for Art and Design courses to increase the intake of students is working well. It allows students with different interests to enter the course and then explore the options. It helps applicants with a general interest in art and design courses.

2. The school promotes a shared experience idea within their eight undergraduate programmes. It is seen as a positive development.

3. The school introduced the Studio+ as an optional year for all of the eight undergraduate programmes. It works well within the structure and is greatly appreciated by the current students and graduates.

4. Interaction Design Programme was introduced as an MA programme in 2015 and in 2017 the BA Interaction Design was introduced which is a great move of the department.

5. The common first year is seen by the students as a good opportunity to get to know each other not only through projects but through informal channels as well.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. Consider collaborations across disciplines throughout the programme (even as a week-long project) rather than in Year 1. It is seen by the review panel as a good opportunity for all the design based disciplines to collaborate as they do in the real world.

2. Most of the faculty are research active and the faculty needs more support at school level and college level. It is important to develop more structured support to the research-active faculty to retain them.

3. More structured support for junior faculty to progress at school / college level is needed.

3.   Programme Aims and Objectives

<u>Brief description of BA Product Design programme</u>

The BA Product Design equips students with a human-centred design skill set to research and develop physical products and their broader systems. The programme focuses on the societal and environmental impact of design and supports students to engage with a wide variety of product design career paths.

<u>Brief description of BA Interaction Design programme</u>

The BA Interaction Design equips students with a human-centred design skill set to research and develop digital products, experiences, services and their broader systems. The programme explores technology in current and future scenarios and supports students to engage with a wide variety of interaction design career paths.

Commendations

1.   The programme aims and objectives for both programmes are satisfactory and provide a good description of the programmes and their outcomes.

2.   Staff and students seemed satisfied that there was, and is, enough diversity between the programmes for them to co-exist.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1.   From an industry perspective, the lines between physical product and digital product are blurring. This is reflected in the module structure but not necessarily in the names or programme aims and objectives.

2.   There was some conversation around the naming conventions for the programmes - as to whether or not there was enough differentiation between the programmes to warrant two distinct programmes. The programmes need to investigate this matter.

4.   Programme Planning and Organisation

The programme documentation is clear, consistent and well organised. The module outlines, as well as the project briefs, give the students clear structures for both programmes and guide them as to what they can expect as they move through the years. The modules build on top of each other and introduce core skills and competencies in a 'bricking' approach. Dividing the Product Design offering into two distinct pathways (PD and IXD) capitalises on the emerging interest in design and growing opportunities for graduate employment. This separation, as pointed out in the Self Assessment Report ensures the core skills and competencies are tailored for each course.

4.1. Programme Structure

The approach of a predominantly project-based delivery structure aligns with other design courses nationally and internationally. However, the condensing of the core material into two years is compromising on the ability to deliver enough skills at the level to which they may be required in the subsequent years. This issue seems particularly problematic as the students undertake their mini and major projects in their final year: some skill deficits have been identified by the students themselves in both the report and during the review. The inclusion of the Studio+ year, bridging Year 2 and Final Year, addresses this issue but it is still optional for students. The recommendation would be to make this mandatory to ensure the student experience and learning is maximised and the graduate output of the highest standard.

There is an organised structure for reflecting on programmatic development as well as teaching and learning approaches. This is achieved through regular programme meetings (with all staff and students), annual planning meetings, student forums and various student feedback mechanisms.

The planned changes in the programme (module descriptors) set to roll out in September 2021, appear to make the programme structure more coherent and clearer to the students. Hopefully these changes will respond to the concerns raised by the students about confusion around the module structure and its risk of being too general across the School of Design. The module descriptor adjustments also formalise some of the ad hoc changes that have taken place over the last number of years (e.g. Professional Practice module in Final Year).

Whilst the programmes are currently very well planned and delivered, there appears to be some issues with the pressure of increasing administrative burdens. Programme administration is supported on a part-time basis, 0.5 of a department secretary role, who would appear to be going above and beyond the expectations of their role. This combined with the lack of separate programme leaders for the two UG programmes would point to the administrative burden falling to the Head of Department and the other academic and

technical staff. These issues should be addressed through additional administrative support and/ or more streamlined administration systems as well as the appointment of programme leaders to each of the two UG programmes.

Commendations

1. Programmes are very well-planned and delivered.

2. Project material and programme documentation is clear and informative, with adequate depth and appropriate content.

3. Well organised programme documentation, transparency for prospective students.

4. Material builds from year to year, ensuring skills and competencies are acquired.

5. Comments from students that skills are not delivered in a timely manner - this issue appears to be resolved with feedback from the most recent students.

6. Reflective process implemented by the team to reflect and develop the programmes annually.

7. Differentiation between programmes, co-ordination of planning.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. Provide additional administrative support.

2. Consider options to make Studio+ year mandatory for the programme.

3. Reconsider module titles. Module titles are sometimes obscure and the link to the content unclear as a result.

4. Organise regular faculty & technical staff meetings to ensure the smooth running of the programmes.

5. Additional management structure is needed to lead the programmes successfully and it is recommended to explore options.

Requirement

Programme coordination - Appointing Programme leaders for both reviewed UG programmes. These appointments are urgently needed to allow both programmes to grow independently from one another to develop their own identity.

5.   Staffing

Note: *The limited time with the PD and IXD teams, during the programmatic review and the fact that all staff were present, might not have given everyone the opportunity to express their individual needs.*

The academic and technical staff are enthusiastic and extremely committed to developing and delivering relevant and engaging courses at both UG and PG. The team is a mix of highly qualified people in a variety of specialisms that together can cover both existing and emerging fields of design. The feedback from the students corroborates this claim and in fact praised the team highly on their support and availability during Covid-19. This is to be commended.

All staff are clearly operating at levels beyond their role and pay grade, and participate in research in addition to teaching and technical duties. This raises issues around workload allocation for staff and career progression. Just ahead of the review a progression policy from Assistant Lecturer to Lecturer was released by NCAD; this policy was not made available to the panel but discussions with the staff indicated that the bar set by the policy is unreasonably high in terms of research performance for what is a predominantly a teaching college. Also, this policy only addresses one cohort of academics and fails to offer a promotion path for senior academics, technical or administrative staff. The path for career development is very unclear, which leads to very serious concerns about staff progression. This issue needs to be resolved as a matter of urgency.

Concerns were also raised at the meeting with staff that technical staff were keen to teach and deliver skills that fell outside their job description. The technical staff clearly have a wealth of expertise and specialist skills that are invaluable to the programmes. It was mentioned that external expertise was often brought in when the skill set required is available in-house. This is demotivating for the technical staff who have expressed a willingness to teach and become more involved in the module and project delivery. At management level, efforts should be made to overcome this issue.

There are a lot of part-time staff delivering core content on both programmes. Some of these part-time staff are wholly responsible for delivering key aspects of the programme content e.g. Studio+. There were additional questions around security of post for part-time staff members that were not posed at the review due to time constraints. This issue might be addressed in the subsequent feedback from the programme management team.

Due to growing interest in Level 10 (PhD) degrees nationally and internationally a plan might be put in place to use this opportunity to develop a PhD model where supervision is shared between academic and professional/ practitioners/ expert supervisors or by creating supervisory teams that span academic institutions nationally and internationally.

Commendations

1. Excellent teaching and technical staff who are delivering above their official roles.

2. Highly qualified and experienced technical and academic staff.

3. Enthusiastic and dynamic atmosphere amongst staff.

4. Use of visiting lecturers connects the programmes with industry and real-world ensuring relevance of teaching modes and content.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. Consider security of roles for part-time staff.

2. Implement an appropriate workload allocation model so that staff can make their time and work clear for management.

3. The following issues need to be addressed at School / College level:

   3a. Staff are clearly working beyond their employment level (e.g. Assistant Lecturers with PhDs).

   3b. Lack of career progression poses a very serious concern for staff in all roles.

   3c. Studio+ is a great asset of the programmes. However, over-reliance on part-time staff to manage important aspects of the programmes is a threat to maintaining the higher standard.

   3d. Administration load of full-time staff is too high.

   3e. Facilitate better integration of Year 1 staff (common Year 1) with those teaching in the subsequent years.

Requirement

Explore a transparent and fair career path for staff (teaching, technical and administration) at all levels.

6.   Delivery - Learning and Teaching

There is a shared first year which is well received by the students and gives a good holistic grounding in art and design. That said, there was some confusion among students who thought they were going straight into a specialist area and not into a common year. If this could be more clearly communicated and expectations managed, it would alleviate any misinterpretation.

Year 2 is the year for 'tooling up' in a specialised area i.e. interaction or product design, and the technical skills required for both. There is a lot of pressure on both staff and students to get through a large amount of content before they commence the final years of the programme which are heavily self-directed.

Studio+ is a fantastic innovation and a very unique approach which would appear to have a lot of positive impact on the students who choose to do it. This year exposes the students to a variety of different experiences from industry engagement to cultural exchanges. This is a key year for the students' development and we would recommend that the team consider making this a mandatory year for all students.

The Final Year of each programme is impacted by having some students who have completed the Studio+ year and other students who are completing the degree without the benefits of the additional year (Studio+). During the review it was difficult to understand how this is impacting the student experience, but it is safe to assume that students completing their degree in three years are at a disadvantage. This would be not only with respect to their preparedness for industry but also the rapport built up with their classmates.

Commendations

1.   Common first year structure

2.   Studio+ gives a unique positive experience to the students.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1.   The Department of Product Design should establish a Teaching and Learning Committee to address the issues recommended under Key Findings.

2.   Explore options to standardise the programme delivery, making Studio+ mandatory for all students. Studio+ is an excellent innovation and should be developed without losing its ability to flex and adapt to individual students, to industry and societal trends and needs. It is key to delivering on NCAD's strategic goals of being 'bold & curious and being connected'.

3.   A better connection between Year 1 teaching staff and the design teaching staff needs to be established to ensure content is relevant and that direct entry students feel part of the design programmes.

4.   Provide for a range of relevant industry interactions throughout the programme, including in Year 1 as well as visiting professionals and studio and factory visits.

5.   Develop critical thinking, judgement and 'eye': Visiting professionals & expertise, industry exposure & a spectrum of design analysis exercises (reverse design; collective reviews of design outcomes & designers; first principles; ethnographic, social, geo-political perspectives; communication, semiotics, aesthetics).

7.   Assessment

In the common Year 1 the students are encouraged to explore their skills. Even though most of the students experimented with drawings/painting, others tried other options including model making etc. The assessment strategy allows enough flexibility not to disadvantage students with an arts background in secondary school. This inclusive teaching and learning method is greatly appreciated by the review panel.

The panel noted that the only reference to explicit module learning outcomes in the briefs was found in the reading material, where most briefs pointed to an online PDF where the learning outcomes could be found.

Many of the briefs also did not include information on how a student could achieve a certain grade. The assessment in each module is based on a series of learning outcomes that must be achieved in order for the student to successfully pass the module. These learning outcomes should in turn satisfy and be connected to the programme outcomes. However, it is not clear in any of the documentation presented to the panel how this works.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. We recommend that the module outcomes should be clearly linked to programme outcomes. We suggest creating a system whereby the connections between the Programme Outcomes and Level Outcomes is made visible to both staff and students. While this may be a complex task it will help the student to understand why the must achieve a certain outcome and how this fits into their overall education throughout the time studying on each of the programmes. This process will also help the staff to get a broader impression of the programmes as a whole and will assist when making alterations to the programmes in the future.

2. We recommend that each brief should include clear information on which learning outcome is being assessed as part of this assignment. The LO's should be clearly presented and information should be provided on how the student should be able to achieve these LO's

3. We recommend including an assessment matrix in each brief that indicates how each grade band is arrived at. As part of this the programmes should think about a common assessment matrix that can be used for practical modules and another for theoretical modules. By having a common module for both of these would help the student to better understand why they achieved a certain grade throughout their time studying on each programme.

8.   Resources

Note: *The following observations are based on a video in the absence of a site visit to show the facilities in the Design Building.*

The studio based teaching environment, supported with workshop and spaces, aligns with how design courses are delivered globally.

8.1. IT Resources

Poor Wi-Fi, software access and lack of a dedicated computer/ IT lab were highlighted as issues for students. The absence of a dedicated IT or computer space appears to impact on the staff's ability to teach software in an effective manner and on the student's ability to, at times, access the necessary hardware they require to complete projects. Also, some spaces are doubling as technical rooms (AR/VR/Photography suite) and as teaching/meeting spaces.

The cost of software appears to be offset to the students; this is a growing concern as the cost of software for college licenses is increasing and the capacity to cover the costs decreasing. However, it also raises issues of equity across the student body if they are expected to pay out of pocket for software. If software is core to the teaching, then it should be supplied by the College.

8.2. Learning Environment

Issues with limited teaching space and limited investments in infrastructure and furniture are noted. The spaces were originally designed with one course in mind, now with the development of different pathways the space may need to be reimagined and reconfigured or expanded. Provision of space for Studio+ students appears to pose a perennial challenge. A permanent solution for space for the Studio+ year should be made, particularly if the year is to be made compulsory for the students. The Year 1, Studio+ and PG students are housed in other locations which means there is a disconnect between the years and a missed opportunity for cross-pollination of learning. A formal shared space could be established that would give the students the opportunity to meet and learn from each other.

The panel suggests that a capital fund be put in place to update furniture and equipment and power supply provision, as well as exploring the possibility of creating a new space or expanding the existing spaces to accommodate the growing number of students and course offerings within Product Design.

8.3. Technical Resources

There are dedicated workshops in place with a vast array of well-managed tools and powered equipment. The workshops have updated their equipment to take cognisance of recent developments in rapid prototyping and 3D manufacture. However, some of the

older machines are in need of regular repair. There is a clear need to upgrade and update the equipment and machines to ensure health and safety standards are maintained.

The feedback indicates that with growing student numbers and the delivery of more UG and PG courses, the demand on the workshops has been increasing. This has resulted in a scheduling system for workshop access with limited time slots for students. This is seen as a negative for both students and staff, as the informal learning and connection that happens between the workshop and design studio has been severed. There is a lack of dedicated space for physical computing which is core to the IxD course. The IxD students expressed an issue with them feeling like they "don't belong" in the existing workshop as the equipment is tailored towards building products. On a positive note, the building of the new facilities in the basement of the Design Building may address these issues in part, as long as this space is adequately equipped to cater to the specific project demands of the IxD course.

There appears to be very little access for students in PD and IxD programmes to the workshops and facilities in other departments. If access is given, it is informal and built on goodwill. Graduates noted that this was detrimental to their projects at times, particularly in Final Year with their major projects, when access to additional and specialist equipment from other disciplines would have contributed significantly to their project outcome. This is a missed opportunity, as cross-disciplinary skills and having access to facilities and expertise across all creative disciplines would be a unique selling point to the student experience.

Commendation

The learning environment mixes studio, practical and technology spaces to deliver a suite of applied design courses.

Recommendation:

It is recommended to:

1. Explore possibilities for structured access to all workshops for all students, perhaps in the form of short projects, taster days in workshops, or a 'renting' model for workshop time.

2. Consider the equitable delivery of both UG programmes within the space.

3. Access to software- offsetting the expense to the students for software that is core to the programmes.

4. Equity of access to resources and equipment for both cohorts.

Requirement

Significant capital investment is required to upgrade existing spaces and equipment as well as create new spaces for the expanding teaching provision and increasing student numbers. The department should investigate funding opportunities for this purpose.

9. Student Feedback

From the feedback received from the students:

Year 1:

The common Year 1 experience varied from student to student. A clear positive aspect of the common year is that students have the opportunity in Year 1 to develop a network of other students going on to do different courses in the College, and get broad exposure to creative practice. This is useful for collaborations, support and cross-disciplinary thinking in subsequent years. It is a pity then that students have limited opportunity to collaborate across disciplines, tap into staff expertise in other departments and use facilities as they progress.

There were a number of concerns expressed in relation to Year 1. Direct entry students indicated that they were surprised by the structure of Year 1. Students have to wait until Year 2 to be introduced fully to specifically-relevant teaching, staff and facilities. There is limited teaching in the Final Year, so for those students that do not choose Studio+, there is effectively only one year of focussed 'teaching' or core skills acquisition time within the degree programmes.

Additional structures that facilitate students to have access to staff expertise, student collaborations, facilities and resources from other departments throughout the degree programme would be a major positive for all students, and in particular students of Product Design.

Year 2:

Students consistently expressed a concern that Year 2 was very loaded. Year 2 has become compressed between a common, generalised Year 1 programme, and Year 3 which for some students will be their final year.

Studio+ Year:

Studio+ year was greatly appreciated by the students. They enjoyed the learning, the experience gathered etc.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1. Review all communications and channels to ensure that direct entry students understand that they are joining a common Year 1 with all other art & design students and to revise the description and communication of programme content and structure to ensure that direct entry design students understand the structure of the programmes.

2. Utilise expertise in visual communication to communicate the structure of programmes to students. Currently, the descriptions are text-heavy, and academic terms are not defined or explained. The descriptions should be visual and communicated widely across various channels. The Department should also consider applying the College's visual communication and user-centred design expertise to the website and communications in general.

3. Review the first year experience to ensure it is progressively relevant to design students - for example, teaching design sketching and process; interacting with staff from the course; relevant industry visits and field work etc. This is particularly important as the programmes have moved from 4 years to 3 years in duration. It is essential that core skills are being taught in Year 1 and that students are guided on what to focus on.

4. Encourage all students to do the Studio+ year and ensure it includes tailored teaching opportunities to take some of the pressure off Year 2.

5. Graduates will either be broadly talented and capable or will have a particular competence that 'gets them in the door'. A mandatory Year 3, which would include Studio+, Erasmus & industry experience opportunities might also include a 4th 'Deep Dive' option into a competency of particular benefit to the individual student, so that they can lean into their strengths or address a particular shortfall. Even if Studio+ affords an opportunity to do this, the review panel suggests a very targeted learning module working with a mentor over a number of weeks.

10. Reports from External Examiners

The external examiners reports seem to be very detailed and comprehensive, recommendations would appear to have been followed through and appropriate action taken. While the advice follow-through of external examiner reports are to be commended it was noted by the panel that the external examiners were from the same institute and there was only one external examiner for each program. It is the view of the panel that this process could be improved and made more rigorous.

Recommendations

It is recommended to:

1.   Select external examiners from different institutes to help maintain the autonomy of each programme.

2.   In future we encourage the use of two external examiners for each programme. One of these examiners should be similar programme nationally or internationally and the other should be sourced from industry. This would help the programmes to seek expert advice from both academia and industry.

3.   We also advise that each year the external examiners should be provided with a report indicating how and where the advice from the previous year's report were implemented.

4.   If the programmes decides to increase their external examiners to two, we suggest that the contracts are staggered so that a new external examiner is assessed by an examiner who has been reviewing the programme for at least one year.

11.   Recommendations for future programmatic reviews

It is recommended to:

1.   If the programmes are to remain separate, we would suggest doing two distinct programmatic reviews to allow the space for each programme to be more fully assessed.

2.   We recommend that programmatic reviews should take place over two days and not one, and ideally in person.

3.   We recommend that the technical staff and teaching staff meetings should be scheduled separately as their needs might be very different and to give each group space to express their own experiences and needs.

4.   We recommend to establish a separate programmatic review of the Common Year 1 to ensure that it meets the needs of the spectrum of students that enter it, especially direct entry design students - that there are foundational learning objectives achieved related to the course chosen by the student, and exposure to the course staff, relevant visiting practitioners and facilities as early as possible in the year 1 programme - and that direct entry students are given specific supports and focus in the first term. The Panel recognises that satisfying everyone in a common year programme is challenging.

12. Conclusion

The review panel would like to congratulate the Department of Product Design on offering two very successful undergraduate programmes: BA in Product Design and BA in Interaction Design. The review panel would like to recommend fully exploiting the opportunities for being a recognised college of UCD. The review panel commends the newly-introduced Studio+ structure as a great opportunity for the students of these programmes. The review panel wishes the Department, the School and the College further success in developing these valuable degree programmes.

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Appendix 1 – Response from Department of Product Design to the Review Panel Report

The task of developing the Self-Assessment Report for the Quality Review of the BA in Product Design and the BA in Interaction Design was a valuable reflective exercise, which facilitated the staff of the Department to review the position of our undergraduate programmes 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. Engaging with the Review Panel was a positive and constructive experience. We welcome the endorsement of the Review Panel for our activities through commendations and will carefully consider the recommendations in the context of developing the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

There was a high level of engagement in the Quality Review process from staff in the Department (and beyond) and from the student community, both in compiling the Self-Assessment Report and in interacting with the Review Panel during their virtual visit. The institution wishes to thank the Review Panel for their time, expertise and constructive comments, both during the virtual visit and in their helpful Report.

We will formulate the QIP to address the recommendations in the Review Panel Report, and many actions are already underway. These include; the introduction of collaborative modules focused on the role of the designer in industry in Year 2 Product and Interaction (2 x 5cr) aimed at further enhancement of provision in respect of the Business of Design, the appointment of several permanent and two-year contracts for staff teaching within Studio+ to help ensure stability and continuity, and the recent approval and implementation of an Assistant Lecturer-to-Lecturer progression policy.

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

(i)   Recommendation 1: The Review Panel recommends that the Department of Product Design should establish a Teaching and Learning Committee to address the following issues:

- Programme structure and workload balance (Year 2 in particular).

- There is a fear that the most of the programme-specific learning outcomes are obtained in Year 2 and in the Final Year.

- Support for students who decide not to take the option year (Studio +) to equip them with the necessary skills to complete the Final Year with comparable standard.

- To find ways to minimise the disadvantage for students who decided not to take the additional year (Studio +). Currently, they will be competing with the students who are in their fourth year of education due to the optional year. However, it is noted that most of the students decide to take the optional year.

- Explore options to overcome this unbalanced Final Year degree calculations for the students who took the optional year in comparison to others who decided not to take the optional year.

- Clarity on common entry vs direct entry: potential applicants need to be informed in advance about how the programme in Year 1 is structured.

- Explore how to better support students taking internships in Europe through Erasmus+, traineeship

funds, work placements and internships etc.

- Explore ways to give access for all students to use all departmental studios within the College. The interdisciplinarity is a great asset of NCAD, but is under-utilised.

  Proposal/Comment: A programme specific Teaching & Learning working group to consider the issues identified under Key Findings will be convened, reporting into the Department's annual programme planning process. Teaching and Learning is the focus of a key Strategic Project through which NCAD's Strategy is being delivered. An important strand of work within this project is focused upon developing a Teaching & Learning Enhancement Implementation Plan. Enhancements in respect of embedding ongoing reflection on Teaching & Learning and enabling cross-disciplinary learning will be addressed and delivered through this process.

(ii) Recommendation 2: The Review Panel recommends that the Department explore opportunities to develop more external collaborations.

  Proposal/Comment: The programmes from Year 1 through to Final Year have regular interactions with industry through a combination of visiting lecturer talks, studio and factory visits, crits with industry practitioners and live industry projects. The Department welcomes this recommendation's emphasis upon external collaborations and currently undertakes numerous live projects with Industry and cultural partners. The College's Head of Enterprise and Engagement continues to foster links with external partners, and develop new and build upon existing collaborations.

(iii) Recommendation 3: The Review Panel recommends that in respect of staffing, clear progression paths are outlined.

  Proposal/Comment: Progress has been made in respect of developing staff career paths with the recent approval and implementation of an Assistant Lecturer-to-Lecturer progression policy. A wider academic staff development and progression model to allow for and support the professional development of our academic staff is being developed as part of the College's Working Together Better strategic project.

(iv) Recommendation 4: The Review Panel recommends that valid criteria other than human-centred design are investigated, for example Environment.

  Proposal/Comment: The Department acknowledges that this is a topic of much contemporary debate, one with which we are actively engaging. This recommendation will form part of our engagement with the evolving design landscape, and emergent themes in the fields of Product Design and Interaction Design, as part of our annual programme planning processes.

(v) Recommendation 5: The Review Panel recommends that the Interaction Design programme team explore more the area of emerging technologies to inform the students about current and future needs and the skills to adapt.

  Proposal/Comment: Students are currently exposed to structured hands-on learning in Creative Coding, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, Physical Computing, and Web Development. This is constantly updated; emerging technologies and future needs will continue to be reviewed and

developed through our annual programme review and planning processes in line with this recommendation.

(vi) Recommendation 6: The Review Panel acknowledges the introduction of Business of Design to the programme as recommended by the Institutional Quality Review Panel in 2017; however the panel recommends that it needs to be developed further.

Proposal/Comment: Progress has been made in respect of this recommendation through the new Design Connections module (5 Credits) and Design Collaborations (5 Credits) in Year 2 Product and Interaction. Further opportunities for deepening knowledge and experience in the Business of Design will be facilitated through the Creative Futures Academy (a HCI initiative, in collaboration with IADT and UCD).

(vii) Recommendation 7: The Review Panel recommends that the faculty, and the Head of Department in particular, need more administrative support to ensure smooth running of the programmes.

Proposal/Comment: Improving working processes, communications and infrastructure across NCAD to support efficient and effective operation is a priority for the College. The College is currently reviewing levels of administrative support and structures across the institution to ensure the smooth operation of all our programmes.

Within three months of receiving the Review Panel Report, the Department will prepare the QIP outlining how it proposes to implement the Review Panel Report recommendations. The QIP will be agreed within the School and signed-off by the Chair of the Review Panel and the Head of Academic Affairs. The QIP will be considered by the NCAD Quality Assurance Steering Committee and then published alongside the Review Panel Report.