NCAD **DUBLIN**

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

BA in Visual Culture

Programmatic Review

Quality Review Panel Report

Date of Review Visit	**25 January 2023**
Date of Report Submission	**21 February 2023**

Contents

1. Executive Summary

This Quality Review of BA in Visual Culture was undertaken in January 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 Visual Culture is delivered and managed by the School of Visual Culture at the National College of Art and Design, NCAD.

2. Key findings about the BA in Visual Culture

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.

2.1. Commendations

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

1. Staff are acutely aware of the needs of the programme. Attention is paid to external examiner's reports, programme reviews, feedback from current and graduate students and industry partners which is evidence of a successful feedback loop in place between all stakeholders and proposed course design.

2. A unique aspect of this programme is the robust defence of the integrity of the written elements of the programme as foundations for critical thinking as well a commitment to the non-vocational focus of the programme. The programme is understood as distinct from comparable programmes within the national landscape. Evident dedication is in place to bring the focus of the programme to "real-world" environments by way of an openness to other forms of communication and diverging media that complement the emphasis on the written word: visual presentations, podcasting, event project management, etc.

3. Core academic staff are research active and contribute to diverse fields of knowledge and practice beyond the learning environment of the College. These competencies, in turn, support a research-informed approach to teaching and

learning with great care taken by staff to draw on diverse creative environments with regard to their contribution to the BA Visual Culture programme.

4. A refreshing approach is taken to diversification of modes of assessment, this is flagged in the BA Visual Culture SAR.

5. The panel note that the organisational structure of the College is under review and commend the proposed aim to consider the establishment of a research office in the future.

2.2. Recommendations for Future Improvement

The panel recommends the following for future improvement. Specific and more discrete recommendations are made in the subsequent suggestions:

1. The panel recommends a review of how the programme documentation is presented to future Programmatic Review panels. Given the volume of documentation provided (often with multiple hyperlinks in soft copy documents), the panel recommends that the option of hard copy versions of documentation is considered going forward or that a more manageable format for digital copies is considered. At present, the documentation is not presented as a proposed programme document and changes and rationale for such are presented in the SAR. Such a programme document is standard in other HE providers. It could sit alongside the SAR and provide a way for streamlining the volume of documentation for external reviewers.

2. Threat to the sector is identified in the industry feedback sessions (written and in-person) with regard to internships/placements. The College has an opportunity to advocate for the value of course accreditation through the programme of learning, and thereby align their voices with industry/sectoral concerns.

3. Graduate students/alumni are a valuable resource for the BA Visual Culture Programme. Programme alumni have harnessed the unique skills they have acquired as graduates of the BA Visual Culture programme and deployed these skills to shape and expand the career pathways they are pursuing. The panel recommends a dedicated, strategic approach to building sustained relationships with the graduate student body who can help with "joined-up thinking" for current students regarding career pathways beyond traditional roles in the CCI sector.

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 Visual Culture. 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:

Tina Kinsella, Head of Department of Design and Visual Arts, IADT, Dun Laoghaire, Chair of the panel

Christa Maria Lerm Hayes, Chair of Modern and Contemporary Art History, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Gavin Murphy, Lecturer and Programme Chair of the MA in Creative Practice, Atlantic Technological University (ATU)

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 panel requested an additional meeting with the head of the department of product design and it was accommodated. 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 25 January 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 visit on 25 January 2023:

Time	Subject of session	Participants
8.45-9.00	Panel together	
9.00-9.15	Welcome, Management Team	Prof David Crowley, Head of School of Visual Culture Prof Sarah Glennie, Director, NCAD Prof Siún Hanrahan, Head of Academic & Student Affairs Dr Emma Mahony, Programme Co-ordinator
9.15-9.30	Panel discussion	
9.30-10.15	Head of School Programme Leader	Professor David Crowley; Dr Emma Mahony
10.15-10.30	Break and Panel Discussion	
10.30-11.15	Current students	Jack Colley year 2; Áine Cassidy year 2; Rebecca Kelly plus year after Erasmus; Aoife Meates plus year after studio
11.15-11.30	Break and Panel Discussion	
11.30-12.15	Staff	Teaching staff for BA Visual Culture
12.00-12.15	Break and Panel Discussion	
12.15-1.00	External Stakeholders	Brenda Malone: NMI; Lisa Moran: IMMA
1.00-1.30	Lunch break	
1.30-2.00	Campus tour	David Crowley
2.00-2.30	Panel discussion	
2.30-3.15	Graduates	Josselin de la Rochefoucauld; Paula Ramos; Isobel Foley; Eimear Regan
3.15-3.30	Break and Panel discussion	
3.30-4.15	Senior Staff	Dr Emma Mahony
4.15-4.30	Break and panel discussion	
4.30-5.00	Head of School	Professor David Crowley
5.00-5.30	Panel Discussion	
5.30-6.00	Present findings to Academic Team	Prof David Crowley, Head of School of Visual Culture Prof Sarah Glennie, Director, NCAD Prof Siún Hanrahan, Head of Academic & Student Affairs Dr Emma Mahony, Programme Co-ordinator
6.00	Finish	

4. Key areas of the review

This report written by the review panel on completion of their visit on 25 January 2023 covers their review of the main aspects addressed in the self-assessment report. The headings are in line with the Self-Assessment Report.

4.1. 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.

4.2. 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.

4.3. 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.

4.4. Programme being reviewed

The programme presented for review is the BA Visual Culture. This programme was launched in 2013 with the aim of providing a dedicated programme for Visual Culture studies at NCAD. Currently, there are no other undergraduate degrees with a primary focus on Visual Culture offered in Ireland. The BA Visual Culture programme in NCAD is distinct from comparable courses within the national landscape which have a more vocational emphasis. Namely, the BA Creative Industries and Visual Culture at the TU Dublin draws modules from academic programmes in Media, Hospitality and Tourism. The BA Creative and Cultural Industries at UCD has specialisms in Music, Film and Drama and the BA (Hons) Arts Management at IADT has specialisms in Heritage, Tourism and the Performing Arts. The design of the BA Visual Culture programme reflects the expertise of the accomplished team of academics in the School of Visual Culture at NCAD, some of whom contribute to the MA Art in the Contemporary World and MA

Design History and Material Culture. The BA Visual Culture programme at NCAD speaks to global and international concerns, as well as specific contexts pertinent to Ireland and Dublin, where NCAD is located. These converging foci are reflected in the BA Visual Culture programme design.

5.   Programmes' relationship with the College

The BA Visual Culture sits within the School of Visual Culture which is one of four schools within NCAD, the other three schools being: Design, Education and Fine Art. The programme draws upon the resources of the Eddie Murphy Library and NIVAL. The Eddie Murphy Library has an expansive collection of resources encompassing an impressive book stock, journals, and DVD library as well as subscription to academic indexing systems that are directly relevant to Visual Culture studies. The Library works with the BA Visual Culture programme, offering library inductions in first year and refresher sessions for the Research Essay workshops in the final year of study. NIVAL houses extensive documentation of 20th and 21st century Irish visual art and design and this resource offers great potential for students on the BA Visual Culture programme to gain access to primary source materials.

Students enrolled on the BA Visual Culture programme have access to a common room which is shared with postgraduate students in the School of Visual Culture. The students on this programme also have access to the NCAD Careers Guidance service, Counselling service, and supports for students with learning difficulties and needs.

Commendation

1. The electives are shared with students in the studio programmes and thus constitute the best existing opportunity for the student and staff cohorts to engage with each other.

Recommendations

1. The electives could be used more strategically as sites of (mixed) group work and even social opportunities for engagement. Possibly, this could lead to greater visibility of Visual Culture within NCAD and further opportunity for artists and designers to be equipped with a better understanding of other roles within the cultural ecosystem, for mutual benefit.

6.   Programme Staffing and Resourcing

The BA Visual Culture programme benefits from a core team of 13 experienced tutors with input from guest and part-time tutors. The programme is supported by an administrator, Neasa Travers, who also supports the Critical Cultures programme offered through the School of Visual Culture to all undergraduate students at NCAD.

The School Administrator is involved with keeping the records of attendance and assessment and timetabling matters, as well as being a key point of contact for students who have queries about the operation of the College.

One member of the core team of tutors, David Crowley, is also Head of School of Visual Culture. Another member of the core team of tutors, Emma Mahony, is referred to in the documentation for this review as head of the Visual Culture programme and course leader. Dr Mahony was appointed as dedicated course leader in 2019. As noted in the BA Visual Culture SAR, this appointment was originally fixed-term for three years and was renewed for an additional year in 2022. The appointment was made to ensure high-quality support and care for the students as well as ensuring maintenance of the programme's content and approaches to learning. To date, there are no other hierarchical structures existing within the programme, such as year tutors. Rather, responsibility for programme delivery is distributed amongst individual module co-ordinators who take responsibility for shaping the content for the module and undertaking assessment. Historically, students enrolled on the programme were not allocated a personal tutor. Students registered on the programme were encouraged to maintain contact with the Course Leader, Dr Mahony.

Since 2021, students have been offered individual tutorials with the Course Leader. Due to recruitment of a larger cohort of students (18) to the BA Visual Culture programme in 2022, a personal tutor role has been introduced to the overall programme structure. The introduction of a personal tutor role to the programme was also informed by the experience of Covid-19. In the BA Visual Culture SAR, it is noted that there is concern about the amount of pastoral work undertaken by the Course Leader and Head of School in relation to the BA Visual Culture student needs. The BA Visual Culture SAR states that there is a plan to establish a 'Personal Tutor' role, by which individual members of the staff team will act as academic personal tutor to a small number of students. In this document it is also stated that this role will be clearly articulated in the *Visual Culture Handbook*.

The Quality Review Panel recognise the key strengths in teaching, learning and research that the core academic team bring to the BA Visual Culture programme. Links were provided to all staff profiles in the VA Visual Culture SAR, though it is noted that some staff profiles are more comprehensive than others. The academic staff associated with the BA Visual Culture have notable achievements in terms of professional educational standards achieved and display a wide-ranging and impressive research portfolio overall. The teaching and research strengths of the core academic staff were also affirmed through feedback from the current and graduate student feedback, as evidenced in written feedback (Appendix 04 and Appendix 05) as well as in the in-person feedback offered to the Quality Review Panel during their visit to NCAD.

The question of diversity in staff hires is addressed in the BA Visual Culture SAR where it is noted that the School of Visual Culture is currently lacking 1.6 FTE contracted academic positions. Alongside consolidation of the role of the BA Visual Culture Course Leader position, the Visual Culture SAR also identified teaching priorities in ecology and sustainability and /or social/racial justice which are not currently fulfilled for the Visual Culture programme at large. The Quality Review Panel note the care paid to the curriculum content for the BA Visual Culture programme and attention to filling gaps in provision that are identified in the BA Visual Culture SAR. In addition, the Quality Review Panel note the need for adequate staff resourcing to both the BA Visual Culture programme and School of Visual Culture and the fine balance required to meet both converging and competing resourcing needs.

However, the Quality Review Panel also note the precarious employment status of the Programme Leader, Dr Emma Mahony, who provides invaluable leadership and support to the BA Visual Culture programme including key contributions to programme design, discipline leadership, pastoral care and essential co-ordination of all of the "moving parts'' of such an ambitious undergraduate programme. Given the currency and relevance of Dr Mahony's research focus on contemporary art, activism, curatorial studies and socially-engaged creative practice, there is clear scope to deploy Dr Mahony's expertise beyond the BA Visual Culture programme and integrate such knowledge and skills across current and developing Master's programmes and the PhD programme in the School of Visual Culture. This move would bring more coherence and alignment between the aims of the BA Visual Culture with its focus on 'future and social environmental changes' and the focus on the "contemporary" evident in the teaching provision offered by the School of Visual Culture across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and provision in the School.

With reference to the overall organisational structure of NCAD, the Quality Review Panel notes disparities in weighting of leadership roles with regard to the four academic schools. Currently, the Schools of Fine Art and Design have identified Head of Discipline Pathways roles in situ. This structure is not reflected in the School of Visual Culture, where discipline leadership currently lies with the Head of School and Course Leader, which is not of parity with the Head of Discipline Pathways in the Schools of Fine Art and Design. Currently, the role of Course Leader to the BA Visual Culture programme is not officially acknowledged in the organisational structure chart included in the BA Visual Culture SAR.

Current students and graduate students reported a lack of integration between the BA Visual Culture programme and studio-based programmes in the other three academic schools (these concerns are also addressed in Section 7: Programme Teaching and Learning). Whilst the Quality Review Panel acknowledge the considerable challenges

posed to on-campus teaching over the previous few years, with regard to Programme Staffing and Resourcing, the Panel note that some Visual Culture core academic staff feel as though they are "service-providers" for studio-based programmes. Whilst Visual Culture staff contribute to all undergraduate programmes in NCAD, a reciprocal arrangement is not formally in place for academic studio staff to contribute to the BA Visual Culture programme.

Commendations

1. The Panel commend the stewardship and vision of the academic leaders (Course Leader and Head of School) with regard to the direction of the past, current and proposed BA Visual Culture programme, which was highlighted by the core academic staff who contribute to the programme as well as by the current students and graduate students surveyed for this review.

2. The Panel note the high-calibre of core academic staff contributing to the BA Visual Culture programme and the confluence of staff research interests that results in a strong social practice ethos that vitally contributes to the general educational culture at NCAD.

3. The panel commend the research-informed teaching approach to the BA Visual Culture programme which provides a rigorous, interdisciplinary context for Visual Culture studies at NCAD.

Recommendations

1. The panel note that the role of Course Leader has been identified as in need of consolidation for the BA Visual Culture programme. The panel also suggest that the role of Head of Visual Culture (as a supporting role to the Head of School of Visual Culture), might be explored to further consolidate provision of Visual Culture to students across all undergraduate degree programmes at NCAD as well as to progress ambitions for postgraduate provision within the school and college environment, more broadly considered.

2. The panel recommend that the role of Course Leader is reviewed and consideration is given to making this a rotating role between core academic staff in the School of Visual Culture.

3. The panel note that hourly-paid staff make a significant contribution to the programme, especially with reference to the delivery of electives. The panel recommend that consideration is given to paying such hourly-paid staff (as well as part-time staff, who are currently paid to attend some meetings) to contribute to BA Visual Culture programme meetings so that the learner journey through all elements of the programme can be considered in the round.

4. The panel suggest that a review is undertaken of weighting between student/staff ratios which is unbalanced for the BA Visual Culture programme when compared to student/staff ratios on some undergraduate studio-based programmes.

5. The panel note that current practice is to weight a larger proportion of preparation, assessment and co-ordination time for teaching against level 9 in the School of Visual Culture. However, significant time is required for undergraduate teaching, especially on a programme with such a specified focus as the BA Visual Culture which has significant focus on complex written outcomes. The panel recommends re-consideration of current weighting of lecturer's time on the BA Visual Culture to take account of the time needed for assessment and written feedback, which usually falls to individual lecturers (as opposed to modes of joint assessment that are usual in studio practice).

6. The panel suggest that further consideration is given to cross-pollination with regard to staff resourcing between Visual Culture studies and studio-based programmes in NCAD. Further consideration is given to this issue in the following section.

7. Programme Teaching and Learning

In preparation for this review, the panel were provided with comprehensive documentation that provided insight into teaching and learning on the BA Visual Culture programme. This documentation included copies of Annual Programme Reviews and External Examiner reports as well as feedback from student, graduate and industry forums.

Two of the stated aims in the College Mission and Objectives (captured in the BA Visual Culture SAR with reference to the NCAD Strategic Plan, *Futures Bold and Curious 2019-2024*), are 'connectivity at the core of learning and research' and connecting 'student's and staff's creative practice into a full range of contexts.' Concerns were raised by current students, graduate students and some academic staff about the integration of the BA Visual Culture programme with studio-based programmes at NCAD. In the feedback from current and graduate students, it is clear that many of the BA Visual Culture student cohort also consider themselves to be practitioners and, as such, they hold an expectation of integration of Visual Culture studies into the studio-based programmes at the College. The panel also note that such integration between the BA Visual Culture programme and postgraduate programme provision in the College is not currently formally evident.

Having reviewed the current co-ordination of the BA Visual Culture programme, the Quality Review Panel note the need for all core academic staff to contribute to the full

and effective functioning of the BA Visual Culture programme. Currently, there does not seem to be a requirement for regular, mandatory meetings between core academic staff, the Course Leader and Head of School. Such meetings would help to ensure that the infrastructure/architecture of this dedicated Visual Culture studies programme remains robust in terms of: communication of programme design (repetition and/or duplication of content), assignment, assessments and integration between programme learning outcomes, stage learning outcomes and module learning outcomes.

During the review, it was noted that there is a need for increased staff responsivity to the disciplinary enquiries identified by the BA Visual Culture students, perhaps especially with regard to the enquiries they wish to undertake for the final stage Research Essay and staff expertise for supervision of such. The Visual Culture SAR identifies teaching priorities in ecology and sustainability and /or social/racial justice, competencies which are not currently specialisms for the Visual Culture staff at large. In addition, the Review Panel also note that feminist informed Visual Culture studies and a specialist focus on art writing/cultural criticism and art(istic) research discourses are not identified in the current or proposed programme design and, therefore, not reflected as strongly as might be expected in the portfolio of recent Research Essay submissions from the final year BA Visual Culture student body.

Commendations

1. The panel commend the aim to align with the current NCAD Strategic Plan and embed the stated ambitions of the College's Mission and Objectives into the proposed, new programme design.

2. The panel commend the identification of certain teaching priorities - in ecology and sustainability and race/social justice - that require enhancement in the Visual Culture programme, broadly considered.

3. The panel note the varied feedback from staff, student and industry experts regarding the need for acquisition of technical/digital skills. There are a number of ways in which such can be delivered but no easy resolution within the current format. A recommendation regarding these issues follows.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommends that further insight into the student journey through the BA Visual Culture programme could be achieved by regular, mandatory meetings between all core academic staff contributing to the programme. Regular meetings could consider future planning, co-ordination and an open forum for course development. Such meetings could enhance a sense of shared ownership of the BA Visual Culture programme rather than, in a worst-case scenario, staff

merely contributing modules. In addition, it would be a progressive move to include non-core academic staff in these discussions. Non-core academic staff contribution would need to be resourced by the College.

2. The panel recommends that consideration be given to concerns regarding integration between the BA Visual Culture programme and studio-based teaching through trialling co-design and co-teaching of modules in the School of Visual Culture.

3. The panel recommends that further discussion is progressed as to how to best resolve the issue of technical/digital skills acquisition and delivery. Perhaps this could be explored in a contextual and embedded way if there was further collaboration between Visual Culture staff and studio staff regarding co-design and co-delivery of BA Visual Culture modules. This could be a way of progressing reciprocity across the academic faculties.

8. Programme Assignments and Assessment

Current students of the programme voiced concerns about "log jams" with regard to deadlines for assignment submissions converging at certain points of the semester. The students suggested that deadlines could be phased throughout the term, with shorter format written or other assignments (other than the traditional essay format) introduced in certain modules to support alternative forms of learning and assessment.

The BA Visual Culture SAR and discussion with academics contributing to the BA Visual Culture programme indicates that consideration has been given to a more multifaceted and diverse approach to programme assignment in this new iteration of the programme.

It should be noted that whilst the assessment/feedback sheets reflect the Learning Outcomes for modules, the Module Descriptors do not name Learning Outcomes as such.

Commendations

1. The panel note that discussion about the range of possible assignments and assessment is undertaken at NCAD.

2. The panel note the wide-range and topical nature of subject choice for final Research Essay/Dissertation which is testament to the depth and scope of subject areas covered in the earlier stages/years of the BA Visual Culture programme.

3. The panel note that students comment on the valuable direction they receive in feedback and the care taken in the feedback they receive.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommends further exploration of varied modes of assignment, presentation and assessment such as podcasting, social media content, visual essays, etc.

2. The panel recommends that these varied modes of assignment could be explored to help to address the issue of converging deadlines/log-jams.

3. The panel recommends that further exploration is undertaken of current debates in practice-informed/artistic research as a bridge between Visual Culture and studio. The possibility of an elective addressing this approach could be investigated.

9. Programmes Aims and Objectives

The Review Panel reviewed the Programme Aims and Objectives, as set out in the BA Visual Culture SAR and acknowledges that the current programme (and proposed changes) broadly support such. The programme:

1. Provides a broad and inclusive engagement with concepts and practices in the evolving field of Visual Culture studies

2. Develops a high-level of research capability, critical thinking and writing skills within its students

3. Encourages the capacity and understanding of its students to act positively in the face of future social and environmental challenges

4. Provides stimulating opportunities for students to fully engage with Visual Culture practices including the activities of artists and designers, public and private institutions and the media. Further alignment between stated Programme Aims and Objectives was evidenced by the feedback offered by current and graduate students with regard to the fostering of an empathetic and informed understanding of the lives and cultures of others, through teaching practice.

These aims are reinforced by the empathy and understanding afforded to students by the teaching staff themselves in their dealings with the students from the programme. The BA Visual Culture programme aims to provide unique opportunities to 'work with our gallery and archives' and to engage with the activities of 'artists and designers, public and private institutions and the media'. However, feedback from graduate students, in particular, reveals that for many of the alumni of the programme, their early career steps upon graduation do not necessarily result in students finding employment in the CCI sector, whether that entails working directly with artists and

designers or public institutions. Many graduate students are shaping the future of cultural production in a broader context and have forged career pathways in fields aligned with or associated with the CCI sector in areas such as digital marketing, content production, etc.

Commendations

1. The panel commends the prioritisation of the written element as a foundation for critical thinking and recognises this as a core principal to the BA Visual Culture programme.

2. The panel commends the resistance to a vocational focus for the programme and notes the initiative displayed by programme alumni with regard to the variety of career paths taken by graduates of the BA Visual Culture programme. Indeed, graduates of the programme display a remarkable ability to shape the various sectors and career paths they are migrating into in an open, uninhibited manner.

Recommendations

1. The panel notes the current impasse with regard to student placements as a result of implementing the working directive on internships. This fails to acknowledge the vital role that interns can play in cultural institutions and vice versa. The panel strongly recommends that the College support cultural institutions in seeking recognition of accredited internships.

2. The School of Visual Culture has a "finger in every piece of the pie" for undergraduate courses at NCAD. This can be harnessed in terms of increasing integration and visibility for the BA Visual Culture programme, for example by directing critical output in collaboration with the studio-based programme for the end of year exhibition and at other key points in the journey of the BA Visual Culture students in the undertaking of their studies through Stage 1 to completion of the programme.

3. The BA Visual Culture programme is an "unacknowledged" leader/flagship in the educational provision at NCAD. The value of this leadership role could be further harnessed to foreground Visual Culture as integral to the educational fabric and culture at NCAD. Spotlighting the BA Visual Culture programme in terms of external communications and marketing could be a way of acknowledging how integral this programme is to the identity of NCAD and to the Irish cultural sector at large.

10. Proposed Changes to Current Programme

The main proposed changes in the BA Visual Culture SAR are:

- Movement of the 'Situations' model from T1 of the final year to T2 of first year.

- Introduction of 'Visual Special Subject' classes in T2 of final year.

- Movement of the 'Collaborative Practices' module from T1 to T2 in the final year.

- Introduction of the new 'Making Visual Culture Public' module in T2 of the final year.

A convincing case for making these changes is made, both in the BA Visual Culture SAR and by the visual culture team on the day of the panel visit.

The review panel noted a number that arising from these changes, the following is not captured in the SAR report on the new structure:

- Reduction of Contemporary Theories and Practices from 7 to 4 modules (NB: Fig 7, SAR, p. 42 does not capture the loss of Contemporary Theories and Practices 1 and the first Contemporary Theories and Practices module shown is a level 2 option).

The panel recommend that further consideration is given to the rationale for additional changes through first to final year of the BA Visual Culture programme and suggest that these changes are fully reviewed before the new programme is validated:

1. More clarity is needed regarding the final year electives, if they are to provide more specialised skills/knowledge when offered to final year students.

2. Further consideration is given to the professional practice modules that run through the BA Visual Culture programme. There is a need to signal and embed collaborative practices more clearly as a spine throughout the programme.

3. As the panel were not presented with a full document for the proposed revised programme, we recommend that full consideration is given to alignment between the Programme Learning Outcomes, Stage Learning Outcomes and Module Learning Outcomes.

4. As the 'Situations' module is moving from the final year to first year, the learning outcomes may need to be adjusted in advance of final validation of the BA Visual Culture programme.

11. Review Panel Summary

The panel compiled this report with reference to the extensive documentation provided to us and with regard to the information gleaned from all in-person meetings during the day of the panel visit. Completing this report, the panel have made their observations, commendations and recommendations with reference to the *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* document which is developed by QQI for all providers. In particular, the panel drew on the guidelines laid out in 'Section 3.3 Programme Monitoring and Review' of this document. The panel were also guided by sections in this document addressing staff recruitment, teaching and learning, and assessment. The final report reflects and captures the observations, commendations and recommendations of the entire panel.

Initial Response to Review Panel Report

Programme or Unit being reviewed	BA Visual Culture
Date of Review Panel visit	25 January 2023
Date Review Panel Report submitted	21 February 2023
Response submitted to QA Office	08 March 2023

Introduction

We welcome the Visual Culture BA Review Panel Report. It is a clear and well-informed endorsement of the programme and the changes made to content and L&T since launch. It also provides excellent recommendations which will act as positive guides for the future. The commendations which the report includes are a very positive affirmation of the high quality work of the staff team.

We welcome the fact that the Panel have accepted and endorsed all the changes which we have proposed to make to the programme from Sept 23 to ensure that the intellectual health and vitality of the programme is maintained and, in some cases, improved. They are outlined in section *10: Proposed Changes to Current Programme.*

In addition to undertaking reviews with current students, the process also meant that we reconnected with our graduates and engaged our external partners/stakeholders in very useful discussions about the long-term direction of the programme and the changed employment scene for graduates. Their perspectives and insights contributed much to the self-assessment report and it is very encouraging to see that the Review Panel has endorsed our responses to the advice and insights presented by these different stakeholders. We feel that they have contributed greatly to the process of the periodic review.

Recommendation 2.2: Recommendations for Future Improvement

The panel recommends the following for future improvement. Specific and more discrete recommendations are made in the subsequent suggestions:

1. The panel recommends a review of how the programme documentation is presented to future Programmatic Review panels. Given the volume of documentation provided (often with multiple hyperlinks in soft copy documents), the panel recommends that the option of hard copy versions of documentation is considered going forward or that a more manageable format for digital copies is considered. At present, the documentation is not presented as a proposed programme document and changes and rationale for such are presented in the SAR. Such a programme document is standard in other HE providers. It could sit alongside the SAR and provide a way for streamlining the volume of documentation for external reviewers.

Proposal/Comment:

We welcome and support this recommendation (and encourage the Quality & Academic Support Officer to modify the guidance that he gives to programmes undergoing review in light of this).

2. Threat to the sector is identified in the industry feedback sessions (written and in-person) with regard to internships/placements. The College has an opportunity to advocate for the value of

course accreditation through the programme of learning, and thereby align their voices with industry/sectoral concerns.

Proposal/Comment:

We welcome this recommendation as it points to a serious matter which impacts negatively on our desire to provide significant professional work placement opportunities for our students. We are confident that the College will support us making the case for the importance of accredited placements which are supported by learning agreements. In the first instance, we propose gathering support from our stakeholder/partners and communicating the value of properly accredited internships to the HEA and other branches of government. In the mid-term, the College's close partnership with key organisations such as the Arts Council (via the Creative Futures Academy) will allow us to press the case in other conversations with other national agencies.

3. Graduate students/alumni are a valuable resource for the BA Visual Culture Programme. Programme alumni have harnessed the unique skills they have acquired as graduates of the BA Visual Culture programme and deployed these skills to shape and expand the career pathways they are pursuing. The panel recommends a dedicated, strategic approach to building sustained relationships with the graduate student body who can help with "joined-up thinking" for current students regarding career pathways beyond traditional roles in the CCI sector.

Proposal/Comment:

This is welcome direction from the panel and accords with College plans to develop supports and relations with NCAD alumni. The BA Visual Culture programme will benefit from this. Moreover, in terms of 'local' actions, we can see clear and strong merits of inviting graduates back to the programme as part of the classes that we run in professional practice modules. This is something that we have done sporadically in the past, but will build on, and the survey we conducted with graduates will enable us to easily identify graduates that could share valuable post-graduation experience to the current cohort of students.

Recommendation 5: Programme's relationship with the College

1. The electives could be used more strategically as sites of (mixed) group work and even social opportunities for engagement. Possibly, this could lead to greater visibility of Visual Culture within NCAD and further opportunity for artists and designers to be equipped with a better understanding of other roles within the cultural ecosystem, for mutual benefit.

Proposal/Comment:

We welcome this recommendation, but with one note of caution: the elective programme is offered to mixed groups of students from different schools and so serves diverse learning needs. Changes to this content will impact on students on other programmes. That said, the use of our electives for more group work and *in situ* learning are matters that we already wish to encourage and staff are increasingly developing alternative assignments and innovative class formats based on break-out discussions and workshops which meet the published Learning Outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Programme Staffing and Resourcing

1. The panel note that the role of Course Leader has been identified as in need of consolidation for the BA Visual Culture programme. The panel also suggest that the role of Head of Visual Culture (as a supporting role to the Head of School of Visual Culture), might be explored to further consolidate provision of Visual Culture to students across all undergraduate degree programmes at NCAD as well as to progress ambitions for postgraduate provision within the school and college environment, more broadly considered.

Proposal/Comment:

This recommendation will be communicated to the College Management Team as it reviews the roles and responsibilities of academic managers at NCAD. The recommendation tallies with discussions which are underway but ultimately falls beyond the command of the School and VC BA programme.

2. The panel recommend that the role of Course Leader is reviewed and consideration is given to making this a rotating role between core academic staff in the School of Visual Culture.

Proposal/Comment:

As above.

3. The panel note that hourly-paid staff make a significant contribution to the programme, especially with reference to the delivery of electives. The panel recommend that consideration is given to paying such hourly-paid staff (as well as part-time staff, who are currently paid to attend some meetings) to contribute to BA Visual Culture programme meetings so that the learner journey through all elements of the programme can be considered in the round.

Proposal/Comment:

PT hourly-paid staff are paid to attend school meetings. Presently Visual Culture BA and School staff meetings are combined. One conclusion that we happily deduce from this report is that we need to hold more dedicated Visual Culture BA staff meetings and so the principle of payment to PT hourly-paid staff to attend these meetings will also apply.

4. The panel suggest that a review is undertaken of weighting between student/staff ratios which is unbalanced for the BA Visual Culture programme when compared to student/staff ratios on some undergraduate studio-based programmes.

Proposal/Comment:

This is a recommendation to the College Management Team and will be communicated to it.

5. The panel note that current practice is to weight a larger proportion of preparation, assessment and co-ordination time for teaching against level 9 in the School of Visual Culture. However, significant time is required for undergraduate teaching, especially on a programme with such a specified focus as the BA Visual Culture which has significant focus on complex written outcomes. The panel recommends re-consideration of current weighting of lecturer's time on

the BA Visual Culture to take account of the time needed for assessment and written feedback, which usually falls to individual lecturers (as opposed to modes of joint assessment that are usual in studio practice).

Proposal/Comment:

Any change of this kind will require revision of an existing Labour Court Agreement and so would involve negotiation with unions / staff team. Any remodelling of the underlying principles which allocate time for particular tasks will also have implications for other programmes offered by the School of Visual Culture. And so, while we will undertake this act of re-consideration – with the support of HR – we will also need to recognise the complexity of this recommendation.

The Labour Court Agreement mentioned above and guiding the allocation of staff hours does reflect the distinct nature of the assessment processes involved in our work and includes the necessary adjustments to respect the nature of the work involved.

Recommendation 7: Programme Teaching and Learning

1. The panel recommends that further insight into the student journey through the BA Visual Culture programme could be achieved by regular, mandatory meetings between all core academic staff contributing to the programme. Regular meetings could consider future planning, co-ordination and an open forum for course development. Such meetings could enhance a sense of shared ownership of the BA Visual Culture programme rather than, in a worst-case scenario, staff merely contributing modules. In addition, it would be a progressive move to include non-core academic staff in these discussions. Non-core academic staff contribution would need to be resourced by the College.

Proposal/Comment:

This is a well-judged recommendation and we happily concur. Given the nature of the work we undertake on the programme we believe that there are key planning moments in the academic year where the programme team needs to review existing curriculum and L&T methods and share updates / innovations (June, Sept and Jan). In addition, there is a need for mid-trimester review meetings with a focus on student engagement / achievement (November and February).

2. The panel recommends that consideration be given to concerns regarding integration between the BA Visual Culture programme and studio-based teaching through trialling co-design and co-teaching of modules in the School of Visual Culture.

Proposal/Comment:

We welcome this recommendation and will engage some studio based programmes in discussion in the coming year 2023-24 to establish what such modules might be. It is likely that new module descriptors would need to be written and so these new modules, if co-teaching can be agreed, will commence in 2024-25.

3. The panel recommends that further discussion is progressed as to how to best resolve the issue of technical/digital skills acquisition and delivery. Perhaps this could be explored in a contextual

and embedded way if there was further collaboration between Visual Culture staff and studio staff regarding co-design and co-delivery of BA Visual Culture modules. This could be a way of progressing reciprocity across the academic faculties.

Proposal/Comment:

As indicated in the Programme Review we have plans to introduce new technical/digital skills into the curriculum in 2023-24. The suggestion of co-delivery will be folded into discussions outlined above. The College also has declared digital learning as a priority within the Strategic Project on Learning and Teaching and so we look forward to the findings of this Project and expect that it will give strong signposts for future development.

Recommendation 8: Programme Assignments and Assessment

1.   The panel recommends further exploration of varied modes of assignment, presentation and assessment such as podcasting, social media content, visual essays, etc.

Proposal/Comment:

This represents a positive encouragement of the direction in which we have travelled in recent years and expect to continue to do so. The ground is laid out in the Programme Document – e.g. the Making Visual Culture Public module – even if the detail is not, as we expect this to be part of the evolving and responsive nature of L&T on the programme.

2.   The panel recommends that these varied modes of assignment could be explored to help to address the issue of converging deadlines/log-jams.

Proposal/Comment:

This is an ongoing issue which is a matter of regular scrutiny. We always endeavour to balance the needs of students to experience sufficient course content prior to assessment but wish to develop assignment strategies which allow for tasks to be divided into smaller elements. There are various reasons why, in some modules, it makes good sense to break down the assessment into small, staggered tasks and so staff team will reflect on the opportunities to do this.

3.   The panel recommends that further exploration is undertaken of current debates in practice-informed/artistic research as a bridge between Visual Culture and studio. The possibility of an elective addressing this approach could be investigated.

Proposal/Comment:

Our response reflects the note of caution expressed above. For some studio-based students, the mixed group elective is an opportunity to step outside their studio practice and develop key skills and understanding from the field of Visual Culture studies (and related fields). Much depends, however, on how practice-informed/artistic research is understood and, indeed, much of the existing elective content addresses these matters (e.g. speculative design, artists as writers, artists films, etc).

Recommendation 9: Programme Aims and Objectives

1. The panel notes the current impasse with regard to student placements as a result of implementing the working directive on internships. This fails to acknowledge the vital role that interns can play in cultural institutions and vice versa. The panel strongly recommends that the College support cultural institutions in seeking recognition of accredited internships.

Proposal/Comment:

See above.

2. The School of Visual Culture has a "finger in every piece of the pie" for undergraduate courses at NCAD. This can be harnessed in terms of increasing integration and visibility for the BA Visual Culture programme, for example by directing critical output in collaboration with the studio-based programme for the end of year exhibition and at other key points in the journey of the BA Visual Culture students in the undertaking of their studies through Stage 1 to completion of the programme.

Proposal/Comment:

We welcome this comment. The Self-Assessment Report includes some innovations in this regard including the Making Visual Culture module. Our commitment to the continued development of alternative forms of assignment will also present further opportunities to increase visibility (podcasting, exhibitions in partnership with NGI, IMMA and other organisations for instance). We will explore whether any new modules co-taught with a studio-based programme (as described above) might have public outcomes.

3. The BA Visual Culture programme is an "unacknowledged" leader/flagship in the educational provision at NCAD. The value of this leadership role could be further harnessed to foreground Visual Culture as integral to the educational fabric and culture at NCAD. Spotlighting the BA Visual Culture programme in terms of external communications and marketing could be a way of acknowledging how integral this programme is to the identity of NCAD and to the Irish cultural sector at large.

Proposal/Comment:

This proposal is a powerful endorsement of the programme and a valuable reminder of the need to spotlight it. Recruitment and programme publicity is managed by the Admissions Team and we will be working with them to ensure that BA Visual Culture remains in the spotlight. We plan to make greater use of the Degree Show as a means for promoting student work and the broader field of Visual Culture studies by means of events and student exhibitions.