National College of Art & Design

Coláiste Náisiúnta Ealaíne is Deartha
A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland
Coláiste Aitheanta D'Ollscoil na hÉireann

Quality Assurance Review in the Director's Office
2007

Peer Review Report

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COLÁISTE NÁISÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHA
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Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Peer Review Group Report
Director's Office
Academic Year 2007/08

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by the Director's Office in the academic year 2006/2007. The Peer Review site visit took place on 20th and 21st November 2007.

Members of the Peer Review Group:

1. Cynthia Deane, Options Consulting – Independent Chair

2. Professor Rod Bugg, Head of Wimbledon School of Art

3. Dr. Pauric Travers, President of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra

4. Ken Langan, Registrar, NCAD – Internal Advisor

1. Timetable of the site visit

Day	*Location*	*Time*	*Action*
Day 1			
Monday 19th November	Jury's Inn, Christchurch	6.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer
Monday 19th November	The Mermaid Cafe	7.00 p.m.	PRG & QA/QI Officer - Informal dinner to confirm schedule and roles of each member of PRG and agree format of review for next two days

Day	_Location_	_Time_	_Action_
Day 2			
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG convene and confirm schedule of events and role of each member of PRG with QA/QI Officer.
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	9.30 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Director, Colm Ó Briain who presents overview of the area and responds to any questions from the PRG.
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	10.30 – 11.00 a.m.	PRG meet with Marion Lynch, Secretary to the Director
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	11.00 – 11.30 a.m.	Coffee/tea and PRG re-cap of meetings
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	11.30 – 12.00 noon	PRG meet with Vincent Kehoe, Buildings Officer
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	12.00 – 12.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Vincent Canavan and Sonny Darcy, General Operatives, Buildings Office
Tuesday 20th November	Campus	12.30 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG, Director & QA/QI Officer tour offices and related College facilities.
Tuesday 20th November	Oak Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG Lunch with staff involved in self-assessment (x9)
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	2.00 – 3.15	PRG meet Heads of Faculty and Core Studies: Professor Gary Granville, Head of Education Kevin Atherton, Acting Head of Fine Art Professor Niamh O'Sullivan, Head of Visual Culture Professor Angela Woods, Head of Design Joe Wilson, Head of Core Studies
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	3.15 – 3.30 p.m.	Tea/Coffee and PRG private re-cap of meetings
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	3.30 – 4.15 p.m.	PRG meet with Trevor Peirce, Human Resources Manager
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	4.15 – 4.45 p.m.	PRG meet with Hazel Poland, HR Administrator
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	4.45 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG private re-cap of meetings
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	5.00 – 5.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer
Tuesday 20th November	Board Room	5.30 – 6.00 p.m.	PRG discuss results of day and agree format of next day with QA/QI Officer
Tuesday 20th November	Jacobs Ladder	7.00 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Director, HR Manager & QA/QI Officer

Day	Location	Time	Action
			Day 3
Wednesday 21st November	Board Room	9.15 a.m.	PRG convene
Wednesday 21st November	Board Room	9.30 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Chairman of An Bord, Joe Mulholland
Wednesday 21st November	Board Room	10.30-11.00 a.m.	PRG meet with SU President, Neil Rudden
		11.00 – 1.00 p.m. T/C	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer as administrative support
Wednesday 21st November	Oak Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	Working Lunch with QA/QI Officer
Wednesday 21st November	Board Room	2.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer as administrative support
Wednesday 21st November	Board Room	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG present findings of draft report to Director, Secretary to Director, HR Manager, Buildings Officer & QA/QI Officer.

Peer Review Group's comments on the timetable

While the schedule for the review was very full, the meetings were well organised by the QA/QI Officer and the group was able to follow the allocated timetable.

The original schedule did not include meetings with the Chairman of An Bord or with the Students' Union president, but when the Peer Review Group requested these meetings the QA/QI Officer arranged them at short notice. The peer review group would like to express its thanks to the Chairman, Joe Mulholland, and to the SU President, Neil Rudden, for agreeing so readily to meet with the group.

2.   Peer Review Methodology

The Peer Review Group (PRG) had an independent Chair, Cynthia Deane, who was appointed by the College. In the two weeks before the review visit, the chair contacted the other group members by e-mail and asked them to suggest any questions or issues that they would like to explore in particular during the visit. At the informal meeting on the evening before the review visit, the group members discussed the self-assessment report and formulated some of the main questions they wished to raise in the review. Ken Langan acted as *rapporteur* for the group.

During the meetings on the two following days, all group members had an opportunity to ask questions so that the relevant issues were adequately addressed. Participants in the meetings were invited to make additional comments or observations at the end of each meeting if they felt there was something important that the Peer Review Group should know and that they had not had an opportunity to say.

All members of the PRG contributed to the writing of the report. The group worked together on the second day of the review to note preliminary comments, and to identify the main *areas of strength* and *areas for development* within the Director's Office which were recorded by the QA/QI officer in draft form. Based on this draft report, the Chair of the PRG made an exit presentation to the Director, Secretary to the Director, HR Manager, HR Administrator, Buildings Officer and QA/QI Officer at the end of the second day. The QA/QI officer circulated the draft report to all members of the Group in the following days. Group members amended the draft and the agreed report was then sent to the QA/QI officer who forwarded it to the Director on 7th January 2008. The Director had an opportunity to check the report for any factual errors before submitting it to the QA/QI Steering Group for publication on the NCAD website.

3. Description of the Director's Office

3.1 Overview:

For the purposes of the review and this report, the "Director's Office" is an improvised title for what is essentially a group of people managing functions that report to the Director. (While the Registrar and the Heads of Faculty all report to the Director, they manage large areas that have been reviewed separately.) This group's only opportunity to be involved in a self-assessment process has been through the review set up for the Director's Office.

In essence, the Director's Office comprises two different groups:
i)   The Director and his secretary
ii)   The Buildings Office, the Head of Research & Postgraduate Development, Human Resources and the QA/QI Office.
On a day to day basis, while there is constant contact and reporting between group ii) and group i), the contact within group ii) is minimal except when collaborations may arise or are sought between offices. In other words, the offices are individual and do not provide a support structure for each other.

The following people were part of the group that undertook the self-assessment report:
Colm Ó Briain, Director
Marion Lynch, Secretary to the Director
Vincent Kehoe, Buildings Officer
Trevor Peirce, Human Resources (HR) Manager
Nicky Saunders, Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement (QA/QI) Officer
Dr. Mick Wilson, Head of Research & Postgraduate Development (HRPGD)

In March 2007 the Head of Research & Postgraduate Development left NCAD for another position. Another appointment for this key position has been made; however the newly appointed Head will not take up the position until the latter part of 2008.

3.2 Mission, Aims and Objectives:

"We are part of a changing educational environment and the Director's Office strives to help College meet all changes, both internal and external while never losing sight of NCAD's primary mission statement." Colm Ó Briain, Director

"The National College of Art and Design is a small domain-specific institution. Its strategy is necessarily driven by an integrated coordination of teaching and learning; research; and knowledge transfer practices. These task-loads are not discrete and attached to different organisational roles, but rather they coincide in the weekly workload of any given individual member of the College's community. The over-riding challenge that this presents to the College community is one of work-organisation and planning so as to allow of a smooth flow of people across these roles and responsibilities in an effective and rewarding manner.

Over the next four years the College community has committed itself to implement a series of strategic actions that concretely realise our shared objectives as a community of teachers, learners, researchers and practitioners working in art and design. Many of these strategic actions pertain to micro-processes of work organisation while others address strategic planning processes. As a small organisation the College has the advantage of scale in terms of flexibility and speed of response to changing external circumstance, however, it also shares with larger organisations the obligation to frame overarching and strategic visions for its own future."

NCAD Research Strategy 2007 – 2011

Aims

- To promote and support a policy-based, strategy-driven organisational culture.
- To be an agent for beneficial change and respond effectively to change.
- To ensure that College processes function in an accountable and transparent way.

Objectives

- To provide the management, the courses and the infrastructure to help the College community to realise its mission.

4.   Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group

The wider context of the quality assurance review

The members of the PRG felt privileged to have been invited to take part in this quality assurance review, which confirmed their view of NCAD as a vibrant, prestigious, well-respected national institution that is currently making an important contribution to the arts in Ireland and internationally, with the potential to enhance its role significantly in the future.

The group was aware that the review was taking place in a wider context of change in higher education: within the institution itself, at the national level (for example with new funding models being implemented by the HEA) and at the international level (in particular the Bologna Process with its emphasis on reforming degree structures and on promoting a common approach to quality assurance across Europe).

This QA/QI process is timely as the College embarks on a new phase of its development. The PRG hopes that its report will help the College move forward and enhance its position in the art and design education landscape of Ireland and internationally.

The scope of the review

As in any complex institution, the role of the Director is multi-faceted, combining leadership and management, both internal and external. The Quality Assurance review offered an opportunity to consider the role of the Director's Office in guiding the vision and strategic direction of the College. In approaching its task, the PRG was conscious of the need to look at NCAD not only as it is now but also to envisage how it might evolve in the future.

The Self Assessment Report expressed a hope that the review process would help to decide on the future structures within the Director's Office. The Peer Review Group noted that while the range of functions in the Director's Office is unusually diverse, it does not include some functions that the group might have expected, such as Registrar or Heads of Faculty. This is an issue that needs to be considered in the context of the wider management structure of the College. The PRG took particular interest in this aspect and it is discussed later in this report.

In carrying out its review, the PRG was conscious that its brief was to examine the roles and functions of the offices and not the performance of specific post-holders. It is important to note that while the HRPGD is part of the Director's Office and took part in the self-assessment process, the position is now vacant and the PRG did not have the opportunity to engage directly with this function during the review visit.

The self-assessment process and the self-assessment report

From the Self-Assessment Report and from the meetings held over the two days of the review visit, the PRG concluded that the QA review of the Director's Office was carried out in a positive spirit of dialogue, openness and collegiality. It is clear that there is great pride and loyalty among staff and students towards NCAD.

The PRG commends all concerned for the commitment and energy they have shown towards the QA process. It appears from the Self-Assessment Report that all those involved in the various functional areas within the Director's Office engaged well with the process and that this produced positive outcomes for the group.

There were two unique features of this QA review compared to previous reviews in NCAD. An external facilitator was engaged and there was also a researcher who undertook structured interviews with staff from all areas of the College and sent questionnaires to

outside stakeholders. The Director's Office group analysed the outcomes of the research and this informed their self-Assessment Report (SAR) in a productive way.

The PRG found the SAR to be comprehensive and honest in its appraisal of all the areas within the Director's Office. It identified some of the strengths and areas for development within the various functions, acknowledging for example that there is a need to be proactive rather than reactive and to ensure that leadership, planning and development supports effective management and delivery of services. However, the PRG felt that the report may have underplayed to some extent the considerable strengths and achievements of the office.

The PRG decided that it was important to include 360° feedback within the review and requested the opportunity to meet with the Chairman of An Bord and the SU President. The PRG would like to acknowledge the willingness of these people to meet at very short notice; their feedback was vital to the review process.

Focus of this report
At the beginning of the review visit, the PRG discussed what kind of report would be most helpful to the Director's Office and to NCAD at this stage of its development. The group decided that its report would try to balance consideration of areas of strength and areas for further development; it would focus on the present and at the same time try to look to the future; it would also pay some attention to strategic as well as operational issues.

5. Report of the Peer Review Group: Identifying areas of strength and making recommendations for quality improvement

5.1. The Office of the Director

5.1.1. The stated mission of the Director's Office includes "creating a community of teachers, learners, researchers and practitioners working in art and design". The PRG endorses this as a good starting point for strategic development of the College and for defining the role of the Director's Office.

5.1.2. It is clear from the SAR and the PRG interviews that there are several different perspectives on the role of the Director. It is important for the future that there would be greater clarity about the role, so that there are common expectations about how the core functions of internal and external leadership and management are carried out.

5.1.3. It is important that the structure of the office should support the leadership and management role of Director. The PRG do not think that the current configuration is optimal for that purpose.

5.1.4. The Director set out five main aims for his term:

- developing for An Bord a focus on the future of NCAD
- making Academic Council an engine for academic renewal and development
- achieving a clarity of purpose for group meetings and boards, with an efficient use of time and energy
- producing a meaningful Strategic Plan with senior colleagues
- building a stronger sense of cohesion and identity amongst the College community and articulating a collective commitment to external agencies.

The PRG commends the progress made towards achieving many of these aims including in particular the reform of academic council; the introduction of QA; the establishment of the RPGD office, and in particular the success of the College's inclusion in the PRTLI cycle 4 which is a landmark in the development of the institution and for research in the Arts and Humanities in higher education.

5.1.5. The PRG recognises that the Director's Secretary plays a very important part in the effective operation of the office as it currently stands. Within her very extensive brief, she manages all aspects of the office functions in an efficient and competent manner. In particular, the secretary plays a key role in producing the annual report which is delivered in a timely manner each year. Her efficiency and effectiveness are widely acknowledged throughout the College.

5.1.6. The graduate network that the Director's Secretary has developed within the Director's Office is a commendable initiative that has the capacity in the future to lead to the development of external links for the future benefit of the College. It could become an important support to the Director's role, for example in public relations, links with arts community/business/industry, in securing funding opportunities and in job opportunities for graduates.

5.1.7. The PRG acknowledges the constraints of physical space within the Director's/Secretary's office. However, as has been identified by the SAR the efficient management of documents including archives and filing needs to be effectively addressed in order to maintain these important records of the institution.

5.1.8. Given the importance of the role of the Secretary, the PRG considers that it would be

appropriate that the role should be re-graded at a higher level.

5.1.9. The PRG recommends that additional administrative support should be available to the Director's Office at times of particular need.

5.2. The Buildings Office

5.2.1. The nature of the buildings makes this role particularly difficult. A good job is being done in difficult circumstances.

5.2.2. The existing informal system of reporting and dealing with maintenance and repairs may appear to some to be less efficient and transparent than it could be. A systematic programme of maintenance and buildings upkeep is desirable through the use of a logging system, together with monitoring of a planned programme of maintenance and enhancement. The use of appropriate information technology should be considered to support this programme.

5.2.3. The equipment and facilities in the maintenance workshops should be reviewed to ensure that they are fully compliant with relevant health and safety standards.

5.3. Human Resources

5.3.1. HR has become increasingly important in all organisations with the implementation of new employment legislation and regulations, the requirement for transparency and the need for support and development of staff.

5.3.2. The position is relatively new within NCAD. In recent years it has been necessary to prioritise immediate issues, particularly in the area of industrial relations. It is widely recognised and the PRG agree that the Manager has drawn on his considerable experience and shown great professionalism in this context and in difficult circumstances.

5.3.3. The HR function is a complex role which has the capacity to be further developed to link the HR strategy to the College strategy, for example organisation and staff development; enhanced communications; improved administration and record-keeping systems; performance management; staff induction programmes.

5.3.4. The HR function is central to the effective working of the College, both in the management of the institution and in serving the needs of the College community. The function needs to be established on a permanent basis and appropriately resourced.

5.3.5. It is recommended that there should be a plan for the development of the HR function with a clear list of priorities in terms of management and supporting the College community both in the long and short term.

5.4. The Quality Assurance Office

5.4.1. The implementation of the QA process has been very successful at NCAD and the PRG is impressed by the extent to which quality improvement has been embedded within the institution. This has been a notable achievement for all concerned – Director, the QA/QI Steering Group, QA/QI Officer and the staff of the College generally.

5.4.2. The QA/QI process has been effective and has achieved widespread engagement in the process by staff at all levels. The QA/QI Officer has facilitated this process with considerable expertise and skill.

5.4.3. While in the initial developmental phase, it was appropriate that the QA/QI Officer should report to the Director, the reporting arrangement in the future should be considered in the context of possible restructuring of College management.

5.4.4. The PRG acknowledges the very valuable contribution that the QA function has made and for this reason recommends that the function needs to be established on a permanent basis and appropriately resourced.

5.4.5. The PRG supports the change from departmental reviews to larger clusters for the future.

5.4.6. The PRG supports the recommendation that the QA/QI Officer engages in relevant and appropriate continuing professional development.
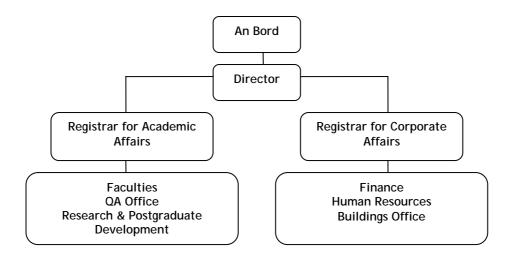

5.5. Research and Postgraduate Development

5.5.1. There has been considerable progress in this area which the PRG sees as being crucial to the strategic development of the College. However, the discussions of the PRG were constrained by the vacant post of the HRPGD.

5.5.2. The PRG recommends further development of systems for promoting staff research, to include attention to research ethics.

5.5.3. The PRG recommends that the College support the development of a research committee to identify and support research priorities across all faculties. This will promote a unifying engagement across the College.

5.5.4. The PRG notes in particular the establishment of the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the quality review of the Director's Office, the PRG re-affirms its confidence in NCAD, from the Board (An Bord) through the Director's Office to all College staff and students. The group hopes that this report will help the College to realise its vision for the future. To that end, the group puts forward a number of recommendations for changing the management structure of the College, in response to the suggestions made in the self-assessment report.

Recommendations of Peer Review Group

1. Reform the top management structure to include the Director, an Academic Registrar and a Corporate Affairs Registrar (or Secretary/Bursar). This tripartite structure will allow the Director to focus on internal and external leadership and strategic management of the organisation. (This does not necessarily mean creating a new post: the current complement of senior/middle managers may be sufficiently large to enable re-organisation of duties.)

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2. Build a small, effective management group which includes both the operational and academic functions to support the Director in the strategic leadership role.

3. Create a strategic framework to enable the development of an institutional strategy for the next 5 -10 years, to include estates planning, academic programmes, student numbers, collaborations and research.

4. Match the organisational structures to the emerging strategy to ensure effective engagement of the senior staff team in the management of the institution.

Communication

The issue of communication was one that was raised both in the report and in the PRG's meetings with College staff. An effective approach to internal and external communication, championed by the Director, has been identified in the report as a key requirement for the future. It is the strong view of the PRG that this should be pursued as a priority. Effective communication will help to:
- Inform
- Engage
- Motivate
- Persuade
- Affirm
- Establish trust

- Build confidence
- Build team spirit.

The College needs to develop systems of communication that are simple, direct and reciprocal and appropriate to the size and scope of the organisation.

Acknowledgements

The PRG would like to record its thanks to everyone involved in this review for the courteous and efficient manner in which they participated.