



National College of Art & Design

**Coláiste Náisiúnta Ealaíne is Deartha
A Recognised College of University College Dublin**

**Quality Assurance Review in the
Faculties of Design, Fine Art & Visual Culture**

Peer Review Report

December 2011



Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. Timetable of Site Visit	3
2. Peer Review Methodology	7
3. Preliminary Comments of the PRG and setting the context for the Review	8
4. Mission & Description of the Design Faculty	10
5. Mission & Description of the Fine Art Faculty	11
6. Mission & Description of the Faculty of Visual Culture	13
7. Report of the Peer Review Group	15
8. Conclusions of the PRG	19

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Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Peer Review Group Report
Faculties of Design, Fine Art & Visual Culture
Academic Year 2011/2012

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by the three Faculties in the academic year 2010/2011. The Peer Review site visit took place on 2nd – 4th November 2011.

Location: The Meeting Room NCAD

Peer Review Group: Chair, Professor Áine Hyland, University College, Cork
 Design, Dr. Catherine Harper, University of East London
 Design, Declan Lyons, Enterprise Ireland
 Fine Art, Paul Cosgrove, Glasgow School of Art
 Fine Art, John Byrne, Artist
 Visual Culture, Professor Malcolm Miles, Plymouth University
 Visual Culture, Professor Michael Archer, Goldsmiths, University of London
 Internal nominee, Professor Gary Granville

1. Timetable of the site visit

<u>Evening prior to review</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
<i>Day 1</i>			
Tues 1 st November	Meeting Room NCAD	5.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer
Tues 1 st November	Eden Restaurant	7.00 p.m.	Informal dinner to confirm schedule and roles of each member of PRG and agree format of review for next three days

Day 1 of Review:

<u>Day 1</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 2			
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	9.00 – 9.15 a.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer and prepare for day
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	9.15 – 10.15 a.m.	PRG meet Senior Management team – Damian Downes, Financial Registrar and Professor Siún Hanrahan, Head of Academic Affairs
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	10.15 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG prepare for sessions
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	10.30 – 11.15 a.m.	PRG meet with Professor Angela Woods, Head of Design
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	11.15 – 11.45 p.m.	PRG review and break (tea/coffee)
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	11.45 – 12.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Professor Philip Napier, Head of Fine Art
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	12.30 – 1.30 p.m.	Light lunch with Faculty Heads
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	1.30 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG – private review of morning sessions with QA Officer
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	2.00 – 2.45 p.m.	PRG meet with Dr. Paul O’Brien, Assistant to the Acting Head of Visual Culture
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	2.45 – 3.15 p.m.	PRG meet with Heads of Design Departments
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	3.15 – 3.30 p.m.	PRG review sessions and prepare for further sessions (tea/coffee)
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	3.30 – 4.00 p.m.	PRG meet with Head of Fine Art Departments
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	4.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Visual Culture staff
Wed 2 nd November	College Tour	4.30 – 6.00 p.m.	PRG, Heads of Faculty tour Faculty and related College facilities – Core, Library, GradCAM
Wed 2 nd November	Meeting Room	6.00 – 6.30 p.m.	PRG – Private recap of day with QA Officer
Wed 2 nd November	Fallon & Byrne	7.00 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Director, Head of Academic Affairs, Heads of Faculty & QA Officer

Day 2 of Review:

<u>Day 2</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 3			
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	9.15 - 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet and prepare for morning sessions
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	9.30 – 10.15 a.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Design students from years 2 – 4
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	10.15 – 11.00 a.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Fine Art students from years 2 – 4
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	11.00 – 11.30 a.m.	Tea/Coffee
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	11.30 – 12.15 p.m.	PRG meet with selection of postgraduate research students
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	12.15 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG meet with selection of postgraduate taught course students
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	Working Lunch with QA Officer - PRG discuss draft report
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	2.00 – 3.00 p.m.	PRG meet with selected external stakeholders
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	3.00 – 3.15 p.m.	PRG review sessions and determine if additional meetings with any stakeholders required (tea/coffee)
Thursday 3 rd November	Meeting Room	3.15 – 5.30 p.m.	PRG commence draft report – agree format and commendations/recommendations common to each Faculty
Thursday 3 rd November	L'gueuleton	7.00 p.m.	PRG and QA Officer

Day 3 of the Review:

<u>Day 3</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 3			
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	9.15 - 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet and prepare for morning sessions
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	9.30 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG meet senior management team – Director, Head of Academic Affairs and Research, College Secretary & Financial Registrar
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	10.30 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	Working Lunch with QA Officer
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	2.00 – 4.00 p.m.	PRG complete draft report
Friday 4 th November	Meeting Room	4.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG Chair presents recommendations of draft report to Director, Financial Registrar, Head of Academic Affairs, Heads of Faculty and QA Officer

It was decided to review the three faculties of Design, Fine Art and Visual Culture during the one visit (rather than reviewing them separately during three separate visits) and this arrangement worked well. The overall review process benefited from the involvement of external experts from Design, Fine Art and Visual Culture and this was very helpful given the departmental composition of the faculties and the inevitable overlap between the different disciplinary areas.

The timetable was well-planned and while many of the sessions may have been rather rushed (because the participants had so much to contribute), there was adequate time at each session to explore the key issues.

The PRG is grateful to management, staff and students for their willing co-operation and their full involvement throughout the review.

2. Peer Review Methodology

The review encompassed three of the four faculties of NCAD, and there was a wealth of expertise and experience on the PRG with external reviewers from the areas of Design, Fine Art and Visual Culture. The PRG included experts from prestigious universities and colleges of Art and Design in the UK as well as an Irish artist and a member of staff from Enterprise Ireland. While all members of the PRG played a full role in the overall review, Dr. Catherine Harper and Declan Lyons gave particular advice on issues relating to the Faculty of Design; Paul Cosgrove and John Byrne shared their expertise and experience in the area of Fine Art; and Professors Malcolm Miles and Michael Archer advised in particular on issues relating to Visual Culture. Professor Gary Granville's familiarity with NCAD and its traditions and practices were invaluable in helping the PRG to understand the overall culture of NCAD.

The PRG decided on individual roles before the formal sessions commenced. Other than the broad specialist roles as indicated above, the PRG decided not to assign specific areas of responsibility to individual members but instead worked as a team. The first draft of the report was agreed by the PRG on the final day and presented as an exit presentation by the Chairperson. The exit presentation was attended by the Director, the Head of Academic Affairs, the Financial Registrar and College Secretary, Heads of the Faculties of Design and of Fine Art and the assistant to the Head of Visual Culture. The QA/QI Officer sent the draft report to the Chairperson for editing. Once the report was agreed by all members of the PRG it was submitted to the QA Officer for proofing and forwarded by the QA Officer to the Faculty Heads.

3. Preliminary Comments of the PRG and setting the context for the Review

The review of the three faculties in NCAD is timely, coinciding as it does with a period of significant change in NCAD and in the Irish higher education system generally.

In January of this year, a *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* was published. This Strategy was endorsed and broadly accepted by the newly elected coalition government shortly after it came to office in March 2011. The strategy sets out a vision for a changed and improved higher education system to meet international standards as well as responding to the needs of a changing Irish society and economy. The Strategy envisages inter-institutional collaboration and consolidation, and states that “smaller publicly-funded institutions, that are not institutes of technology or universities should be encouraged to align with or be incorporated into institutions of sufficient scale to enable overall quality and efficiency objectives to be met”.

In anticipation of this strategy, NCAD had initiated discussions with other higher education institutions in the Dublin area with a view to collaboration. Shortly before the PRG visited NCAD, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by NCAD with University College Dublin. This MoU includes an agreement that UCD validate all NCAD degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate) commencing with the 2011 intake of students. The decision to enter into an agreement with UCD was driven by NCAD’s vision of itself as a National College of Art and Design within the university sector, rather than within the institute of technology sector. In this regard, the PRG noted that within the past decade in Ireland, there has been radical internal restructuring in the university sector. Traditional faculty structures have been replaced by Colleges and/or Schools, and responsibilities and budgets which were held centrally have been devolved to the new intermediate structures.

In recent years, the configuration of NCAD undergraduate and postgraduate degrees has been brought into line with the Bologna process. Semesterisation and modularisation have been introduced, and all programmes and modules have been redesigned with a focus on Learning Outcomes. NCAD recently decided that all faculties should discontinue their 4-year undergraduate Bachelors’ programmes, and that they should be redesigned within a 3+2+(3) format i.e. 3 years’ Bachelors; followed by a 2 year Masters; followed by a 3 years doctoral programme. This will involve reconfiguring the undergraduate experience within a three year frame. It is intended to introduce a 30-week First Year programme – with three ten week blocks. In the first ten weeks students will concentrate on core modules; in the following two blocks, they will gradually begin to specialise. Programmes in all faculties have been redesigned in accordance with the 3+2+3 model and are currently being read and reviewed by external critical friends. Next semester, the proposed new programmes will undergo the normal internal processes of review with a view to being approved by Academic Council.

Within the new structure, there will be a greater focus on postgraduate education than there was in the past. The development of a more structured approach to graduate education, led by GradCAM in the past four years, will continue and it is planned to increase the number of doctoral students in all faculties and areas of specialisation.

In the context of the review of the three faculties, and prior to meeting the various stakeholders, the PRG read and discussed the documentation, and in particular the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the Heads of the Faculties. The PRG would like

to commend the Heads of the faculties on the comprehensive documentation provided and on their honest reflection and analysis of the current situation in their faculties. We would also like to express our recognition of the rigour of the process and our appreciation of the frank and open engagement of all the stakeholders. We were impressed by the commitment and loyalty of the staff, and by the exceptionally positive comments made by students – undergraduate and postgraduate; full-time and (postgraduate) part-time. The PRG recognises that during the past two years, there has been intense discussion on the academic re-structuring of programmes in NCAD and that while the process was undoubtedly unsettling for some staff, there is no doubt that it will ultimately lead to a positive outcome. It was noted that even among those who articulated concerns about the proposed changes, the response was constructive and reflected genuine engagement.

The next sections (4, 5 and 6) summarise the mission and the description of the three faculties and this is followed by an analysis and comments by the PRG.

4. Mission and Description of the Faculty of Design

"Design stimulates the senses, improves the quality of life, enriches our surroundings and gives our sense of identity visual expression.

The Design Faculty provides a rich & stimulating environment with the freedom to provoke thought, generate new ideas and products, gain both specific design and career enhancing skills and breath life into emerging design perspectives. This enthusiasm for innovation is in-built within the Faculty and Departments, its staff and students.

The Faculty is determined to exploit the breadth of opportunities within and between the design disciplines and continues to prepare our graduates to work within the creative industries for the advancement of societal change"

Design plays a leading role within the NCAD with the largest student body and, with the faculty's involvement with the creative industries both here and abroad, through collaborative projects and research within emerging areas of growth and national concern including User-Centered, Sustainable and Medical Device Design. As a result of the breadth and depth of the faculty's activities, it is well placed to contribute to the development of the creative designers of the future. The Design Faculty is proud of its staff, student and graduate achievements, with a network of alumni and creative industry contacts world-wide.

The Design Faculty is committed to the promotion of design education and research within the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland. The primary aims and objectives of the Faculty are:

1. To expand contemporary thinking of the role of Design within industrial, societal and cultural contexts
2. To provide undergraduate and postgraduate critical design education and research
3. To prepare students for a wide range of diverse career paths
4. To foster academia/industrial collaborations within the national and international creative industries
5. To promote the work of students and staff within the Faculty.

The Design Faculty has adopted strategic ways of growing our international reputation by addressing the creative, commercial and social issues that impact on our programmes through a range of initiatives that ensure:

- Research that reflects the culture, business and future of the disciplines
- That our courses reflect current and emerging thinking and practice
- The enhancement of our relationship with industry partners through sponsored and collaborative projects, valuable work placements and graduate internship programmes.
- Educational excellence and our pre-eminent role within Design education.

These strategies have focused the Faculty Mission at a time of radical change in both the educational and the economic landscapes within Ireland.

The Design Faculty is focussing on the opportunities inherent within a semesterised 3+2(+3) structure. The strengths of the Faculty - its industry and international links, the collaborative nature of design, the solution-oriented thrust of design education and the Faculty's successes in funding opportunities, can all be built on to ensure a robust and flexible 3+2(+3) design framework.

5. Mission and Description of the Faculty of Fine Art

“Our educational mission is to enable people to construct differing perspectives for engagement within contemporary art practices and to operate effectively within wider cultural realms.”

The Faculty of Fine Art at the NCAD is organised as four Departments – Painting, Print, Media and Sculpture. The Departments are located as discreet areas which are broadly ‘self sufficient’ in terms of teaching resources, spatial organisation, and digital and manipulation resources in relation to practice. There are opportunities for common platforms for student learning. At present there are particular issues to address in relation to student numbers and the present configuration of teaching and studio resources.

The Faculty teaches both undergraduate and post graduate students to PhD level. The latter postgraduate cluster is the biggest concentration in the college and in the State. The postgraduate cohort shares faculty provision in terms of deliverable elements and in its relationship to the Faculty of Visual Culture.

For this Faculty, organisation within departmental disciplines has created an environment of knowledge depth and the rudiments, nuances and facility of a disciplinary background (to share). The organisation around disciplines has had the advantage of successive contact with students through elements of a 3-year period of study and activity of the 4-year degree course. There can be an important learning bond between staff and students created. This also extends to forms of pastoral guidance, educational accountability and close input into issues of student welfare. Within this structure the development of individual and peer group working is sustained and is mutually beneficial. This often contributes to dynamic senses of project engagement and commitment on the part of students and staff beyond college delivery.

Student work articulates itself in a wide variety of forms not held by ‘traditional’ titles or definitions of medium. The Departments are substantially defined more by differentiations of ethos, and cultural intention, and by their models of engagement, and less by definitions of materiality. The models of practice are not the same across the Faculty. This is to say that for example in painting the individual practitioner and the ‘gallery model’ in relation to studio production and gallery distribution is strong and is seen as key to the discipline, were as in sculpture for example, an expanded/social model is more pronounced where questioning the sites of production and distribution are part of the critique of models of practice. The Media Department (formed in 1999) has also developed particular interrogations of lens based and virtual media in relation to audience, as an educational strand. The Print Department has straddled conceptions of fine art mark-making and expression, with the radical proposition of access to reproductive, distributable forms. These descriptions are not exclusive characteristics of each department, but reflect research forms and enthusiasms.

The Departments have suites of digital tools and have differentiated plant and equipment serving production (and distribution) modes evolving from the nature of the discipline. The faculty therefore embraces a range of skills, not taught or learned by rote but in relation to what might be appropriate in relation to student enquiry as part of critical engagement. The question of appropriate skills continues to be the subject of debate at departmental and tutorial level. There is not a sense of a vocational skills training but rather introductions to expanded conceptions of skill

bases and increasingly, reciprocal exchanges of skills. This dialogue and balance between skills and ideas is always in motion.

The curricular developments offered by Bologna and the development of a modular structure with attendant transferability of credits and courses opens potentials and possibilities - for example, the operation of the Erasmus programme of institutional student and staff exchanges across Europe. There has been substantial student traffic in and out. In its implementation of modules and credits the Fine Art Faculty has chosen to build sequential practice-based models ending in one summative examination in the form of an exhibition. The appropriate credits pass each student to the next year of the course. The grade point score is not carried and starts new each year.

Looking forward towards the opportunities offered by 3+2+(3) there is a growing concentration on the value of interdisciplinary activity as unlocking the potential for new and alternative knowledge, and in producing connectivity. The other characteristics of our contemporary landscape are a more significant discursive environment within culture and are manifested in fine art practices. There has also been a radical growth in the role of theory in relation to practice. There are significant questions considering fundamental constructions of meaning and being, in our contemporary idiom. The challenges for our course are its capacity to change to meet these developments by building knowledge-depth and knowledge-breadth through practice.

6. Mission and Description of the Faculty of Visual Culture

“The Faculty of Visual Culture plays a leading role as a hub within NCAD, around which research, teaching and practice are orientated. It exists as a vital facilitating structure within the college — taking a leading role as a promoter of critical dialogue, both within the college and without — as well as generating and supporting original scholarship of direct relevance to the current challenges and aspirations of an independent, nationally-positioned and inter-nationally oriented, art and design college.

Thus the Faculty of Visual Culture:

- (i) is integral to the research culture of the college — at undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral level*
- (ii) facilitates the research and contextualizing activities of staff and students*
- (iii) promotes dialogue between staff and students across and between the disciplines of Core, Fine Art, Design and Education*
- (iv) mediates and maintains the connections between different constituent groups within the college and with peers and other communities beyond the college*
- (v) helps to ensure the academic reputation and status of the college within the university sector, nationally and internationally.”*

The Faculty of Visual Culture engages with the spectrum of visibility and employs a range of challenging methodologies to interrogate the field. It is staffed with dynamic specialists and recognised researchers, who are committed to curriculum innovation; who play a vigorous role in the holistic formation of the artists, designers and art and design educators of the future; who are catalysts for the generation of new ideas; and who facilitate the integration of theory and practice, to the highest academic level.

The Faculty of Visual Culture is uniquely placed in that all students have contact with it. It is a vital facilitating structure within the college — taking a leading role as a promoter of critical dialogue, both within the college and without — as well as generating and supporting original scholarship of direct relevance to the current challenges and aspirations of an independent, nationally-positioned and *inter*-nationally oriented, art and design college.

The study of Visual Culture is integral to the value of the degrees offered within the current college programme, and the forthcoming 3+2(+3) structure, making those studies relevant and applicable to the wide-ranging challenges and opportunities of the working world. In Visual Culture students are taught a range of ways to analyze and situate their own practice, and that of others, in the contemporary world. They are trained to become visually literate, expressive and articulate, so that they can critique objects, processes, institutions and concepts of visual and material culture. Students are guided in understanding how art and design are produced and consumed in social contexts, and how this is related to the production of knowledge. Students study the connections between history, theory and practice, in modern and contemporary contexts, in order to become reflective and effective practitioners.

The study of the history and theory of art, with a focus on the modern and contemporary, provides students with a solid awareness of the roles that art plays in

society and the multiple practices associated with art. Similarly, the history and theory of design and material culture provides the opportunity for interrogating the design, production and consumption of objects, spaces and the material culture of everyday life. Students in the Faculty of Visual Culture develop the knowledge and intellectual tools to address art, design and material culture within their national and international contexts

To study visual culture also means to look at the products of society and their role in the production of knowledge in terms of their availability to vision. It thus encompasses the well-established fields of art and design while going further to investigate the broader field of contemporary culture with its technological dimension. 'Human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever,' Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, and in this era when 'life takes place on screen...your viewpoint is crucial'. The emergent academic field of visual culture studies is, according to W.J.T. Mitchell, 'a site of convergence across disciplinary lines.' It offers urgent analytical responses to these changed conditions. Mirzoeff says that visual culture is now 'the locus of cultural and historical change.'

The critical consideration of creativity, expression and communication are central to the curriculum. They are at the heart of the art and design student experience at NCAD. In Visual Culture studies they are cross referenced with individual disciplines, such as history, critical theory, cultural studies, aesthetics, media and film.

Historically, one of the strengths of NCAD graduates has been their broad awareness of the cultural context in which contemporary artists and designers operate, and their ability to locate their own work within this context. Through their participation in the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, students studying in the Faculty of Visual Culture develop both general and specialized knowledge bases, skills in research and verbal articulation, and individual research interests. Students are thus facilitated in contextualising and developing their own practice. The Faculty also develops students' expertise in successfully communicating the outcomes of their practice to different audiences and peer groups.

The aims of the Faculty of Visual Culture are to:

- facilitate close integration between theoretical and studio aspects of art and design education
- provide students with the knowledge to understand, question and challenge their own practice
- provide students with the skills and expertise to communicate their research and work to peers and other communities
- promote integration of learning across all faculties and courses.

8. Report of the Peer Review Group (Commendations and Recommendations)

8.1. Philosophy / Mission of NCAD

- 8.1.1 NCAD has a clear vision of its position within the university sector which is reflected in its overall focus and in the academic content/ structure of its programmes.
- 8.1.2 NCAD senior management has a clear grasp of the complex and unique balance between the academic and the vocational role of the College and this is reflected in the way the College has positioned itself and its graduates in Irish society, its economy and its culture.
- 8.1.3 The PRG is cognisant of a sea change in national higher education policy including economic realities, and acknowledges that forward planning for NCAD must occur within that context.

8.2. College Structures

- 8.2.1 Given the size of NCAD (fewer than 1000 full-time students), the College has a large number of tightly defined units, which dictate and dominate the culture and determine curriculum development, content and delivery.
- 8.2.2 The PRG notes that two vacancies will shortly exist for the Heads of two Faculties. This provides a unique opportunity to reconsider the historical organizational structure and resource allocation. Will the NCAD of the future need 4 faculties and 11 academic departments? Such highly compartmentalized structures are probably inappropriate for the needs of an imaginative new curriculum that should foster links and encourage collaborative work across and between disciplines.

8.3 Academic Matters

- 8.3.1 The PRG commends the college in taking the decision to introduce a 3+2(+3) structure. The College should project the 5-year programme as a defining characteristic of NCAD.
- 8.3.2 The adoption of 3+2(+3) will change the balance of undergraduate to postgraduate from a current ratio of 75:25 to a ratio closer to 60:40. This will need to be recognised in a revised postgraduate strategy which should include an enhancement of supports and facilities available to the postgraduate community.
- 8.3.3 The PRG commends the careful consideration and due diligence that has been given to the structure of the 3-year programme, including the proposed new innovative 10+10+10 week first year model.
- 8.3.4 Equal consideration and diligence now needs to be given to the postgraduate element of the 5 year offer. There is now an opportunity to review the overall structure of taught Masters programmes, and the PRG

recommends that NCAD considers a "common element plus electives" model, to facilitate both single and interdisciplinary work.

- 8.3.5 The PRG recognizes and commends the considerable work that has gone into the design stage of the 3+2(+3) structure. The PRG recommends that a process should be put in place to engage all levels of the academic community (staff and students) in the implementation process to ensure successful and timely implementation.
- 8.3.6 Given that it is proposed to enrol students in years 1 & 4 of the new 5-year framework in September 2013, there is an imperative to promote the strategy in schools, feeder institutions and other stakeholders.
- 8.3.7 There is a need to address unevenness in timely feedback on assignments - especially in the area of visual culture. This issue was raised by a number of students.
- 8.3.8 The PRG notes the considerable potential for academic synergies with UCD, in particular at postgraduate levels, taught and research.

8.4. Research and Postgraduate Studies

- 8.4.1 The PRG notes the growth in research activity in NCAD in recent years. We also note NCAD's research strategy and the proposal to develop a Research Institute.
- 8.4.2 As regards Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, the PRG would like to draw attention to the importance of policy and systems to facilitate recording and audit of expenditure, income, impact, IP and ethics.
- 8.4.3 The PRG notes and commends the support available to staff in completing doctoral programmes and maintaining currency in their disciplines. All staff must work towards developing and enhancing a research culture in their disciplinary areas and towards identifying opportunities for interdisciplinary research.
- 8.4.4 As the balance between undergraduate and postgraduate shifts, the specific requirements of postgraduate students need to be recognised and met in order to develop an engaged research culture.
- 8.4.5 The PRG notes the potential opportunities that will arise for collaborative research and other engagements as a result of the relationship with UCD.
- 8.4.6 The PRG notes that currently there are no formal structures for postgraduate research students to engage in teaching assistantships or suchlike. Such opportunities for research students are a key contributor to the development of postgraduate culture as well as being a significant additional dimension to learning and teaching at undergraduate level. This is an academic matter, being an important aspect of the general expectation of all research programmes in the university sector. It should not be regarded only as an issue pertaining to staff working conditions.
- 8.4.7 The PRG note the impressive work of GradCAM to date and its potential as an on-going support for graduate students. The funding under PRTL IV will

end shortly and GradCAM will now be entering a new phase. How the alliance with UCD will impact on that is not yet clear.

- 8.4.8 While many students were very positive about the support they have had to date from GradCAM, this enthusiasm was not shared by all students. Some students had difficulty with the timetabling of sessions while others were not convinced of their relevance to their area of research. The PRG would have some concern about the apparent proposal to make specific modules compulsory and credit-bearing for PhD students, and notes that a recent recommendation from the European University Association (EUA) following a 5-year study reads as follows:

“Applying the credit system developed for cohorts of students in the first and second cycles is not a necessary precondition for establishing successful doctoral programmes. Some universities consider credits useful for the taught components of doctoral education, especially in cross-institutional (joint) doctoral programmes. Credits, however, do not make sense when measuring the research component or its associated dissemination outputs. Applied wrongly, rigid credit requirements can be detrimental to the development of independent research professionals. High quality doctoral education needs a stimulating research environment driven by research enthusiasm, curiosity and creativity, not motivated by the collection of credits.” EUA Salzburg II Recommendations October 2010

8.5. Facilities and Resources

- 8.5.1 The PRG noted the current relatively generous student-staff ratios and regarded these as an advantage to achieving an optimal balance in teaching, research, curriculum development, administrative and engagement activities.
- 8.5.2 The PRG commended the excellent support provided for staff and students by the Library.
- 8.5.3 It was noted that the working space available for NCAD students was generous by the standards experienced by members of the PRG.
- 8.5.4 It was also noted that workshops, including equipment, compared well with similar institutions in the U.K.
- 8.5.5 The PRG suggested that student concerns about a lack of clarity and visibility regarding timetables be addressed.
- 8.5.6 IT infrastructure and the effectiveness of the Virtual Learning Environment in NCAD do not compare well with IT facilities in other university institutions. This should be significantly enhanced as a matter of priority and should be compatible with UCD facilities.
- 8.5.7 The PRG notes that the Medical Devices Design course is delivered jointly with TCD and UCD. Students on this course pointed out that access to relevant reading material and online resources in those institutions is restricted for NCAD students. This issue needs to be addressed.
- 8.5.8 Access to online journals is relatively recent in NCAD Library and is limited. In the burgeoning postgraduate culture of NCAD, the alliance with UCD

needs to be exploited to ensure that NCAD will have access to the full range of online resources available.

8.6. External Relations and Communication

- 8.6.1 There is need for a coherent institutional strategy in relation to the College's interface with external stakeholders including those in academia, local authority and state agencies, business, enterprise, social community and cultural sectors.
- 8.6.2 The PRG commends the imminent appointment of a Development Officer. This role will incorporate both fundraising and the development of external relationships.
- 8.6.3 The PRG notes the need for NCAD to be more proactive in promoting the college through the website media and other means.
- 8.6.4 In the context of the alliance with UCD new opportunities will arise to develop further international links and attract international students. Such opportunities should be fully exploited.

8.7. Individual Faculty Issues

- 8.7.1 The vision statements of some Faculties are more forward-looking than others. While the Design Faculty self-assessment report is very thorough in documenting the achievements of the Faculty to date, it does not exploit the potential of its constituent disciplines to contribute to a dynamic national statement for design education.
- 8.7.2 Fine Art staff and students operate with a coherent and collective sense of identity as members of a faculty. This was evident in the porosity of the various disciplines within Fine Art and their engagement with the Faculty of Visual Culture. There is nevertheless an evident commitment to individual discipline and to the relevant specific skills.
- 8.7.3 The same sense of overall coherence was not as strong in the Faculty of Design. The PRG recognises the prominence given to skill acquisition and development in that faculty, but notes the importance of student engagement with the other components of a holistic design education, in a university environment.
- 8.7.4 The PRG notes that Visual Culture is central and integral to the education of all students in NCAD. This must be clearly reflected in any curriculum or institutional structure revision. It is recommended that NCAD attends to any tensions, current or emergent on this issue.
- 8.7.5 In the teaching of Visual Culture, the PRG recommends that a wider range of teaching and assessment strategies are used, congruent with the learning outcomes in this area. In particular ways should be explored to set up seminar situations which will allow all students to contribute and present.

9. Conclusions of the PRG

The PRG would like to congratulate NCAD on its decision to establish itself confidently as a national college of art and design within the university sector. It recommends that the opportunities arising from its new relationship with UCD be fully exploited. These will include opportunities for sharing infrastructure and resources, as well as developing new shared programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

It commends the College on its recent decision to embrace a 3+2+ (3) model of programme design and notes the engagement by staff across all faculties in the re-design of programmes to fit the new model. It recommends that this constructive engagement be channelled at the implementation stage and that opportunities be provided for staff and students to be involved in developing an implementation strategy.

The PRG notes that NCAD intends to strengthen and give renewed emphasis to postgraduate education and research and commends the College for its progress on this aspect of its development to date.

It recognises that there will shortly be two vacancies for Heads of Faculties and suggests that this will provide an opportunity for NCAD to reconsider the current faculty and departmental structures.