



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
Department of Media**

Peer Review Report

November 2010

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. Timetable of Site Visit	3
2. Peer Review Methodology	6
3. Description of the Department of Media	7
4. Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group	9
5. Report of the Peer Review Group	10

COLÁISTE NÁISÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHÁ
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland
Coláiste Aitheanta d'Ollscoil na hÉireann

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Peer Review Group Report
Media
Academic Year 2010/2011

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by Media in the academic year 2009/2010. The Peer Review site visit took place on 28th and 29th October 2010.

Location: The Meeting Room NCAD

Peer Review Group: Pat Cooke (Chair), School of Art History and Cultural Policy, UCD

Dr. Tim O'Riley, Chelsea College of Art

Aisling Prior, Arts Curator

Teresa McKenna, Head of Core Studies & Internal Advisor, NCAD

1. Timetable of the site visit

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
<i>Day 1</i>			
Wednesday 27 th October	NCAD Meeting Room	5.15 p.m.	PRG meets with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer to confirm schedule and roles of each member of PRG and agree format of review for next two days
Wednesday 27 th October	Fallon & Byrne Restaurant	7.00 p.m.	PRG & QA/QI Officer - Informal dinner

Day 1 of Review:

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 2			
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	9.00 – 9.15 a.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer and prepare for sessions
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	9.15 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet Director, Professor Declan McGonagle & Registrar, Ken Langan.
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	10.00 – 10.15 a.m.	PRG – private recap of meeting
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	10.15 – 10.45	PRG meet Professor Philip Napier, Head of Fine Art Faculty
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	10.45 – 11.15 a.m.	PRG meet with Anthony Hobbs, Head of Media to discuss Department and respond to any questions regarding the Self-assessment Report (SAR).
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	11.15 – 11.30 a.m.	Coffee/tea
Thursday 28 th October	NCAD Facilities Tour	11.30 – 12.15 p.m.	PRG, Head of Media & Head of Fine Art tour Department and related College facilities, Core, Library.
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	12.15 – 12.45 p.m.	PRG meet with academic Department staff: Leah Hilliard, Eligible Part-time Lecturer (EPL); Cliona Harmey, EPL Claire Nidecker, Part-time lecturer; Benjamin Gaulon, Part-time lecturer
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	12.45 – 1.15 p.m.	PRG meet with technical Department staff: Michael Kay, Technician; Julia Kemperman, Eligible part-time Technical Assistant (EPTA); Mickey Smyth, EPTA; Mark Jones, Part-time Technician; Denise Beck, Part-time Technician
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	1.15 – 1.45 p.m.	Light lunch with Media Staff
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	1.45 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG prepare for afternoon sessions
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	2.00 – 2.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Dr. Siún Hanrahan, Head of Research & PG Development
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	2.30 – 2.45 p.m.	PRG and QA/QI Officer - Private recap
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	2.45 – 3.30 p.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Student Representatives: Year 2 B.A: Michelle Doyle Year 3 B.A: Rory Moorehead Year 4 B.A: Gearóid O'Dea
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	3.30 – 3.45 p.m.	PRG and QA/QI Officer - Private recap on student session Tea/Coffee

Continued/-

Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	3.45 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG meet with postgraduate Student Representatives: ADW: Eimear Fitzmaurice MFA: Louise Croke PhD x 2: Ruby Wallace, Naomi Sex
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG meet Visual Culture representative, Declan Long
Thursday 28 th October	The Meeting Room	5.00 – 5.30 p.m.	PRG meet with external partners and stakeholders: Sheena Barrett, Dublin City Council Ruth Flynn, the Digital Hub
Thursday 28 th October	The Clarence Tea Rooms	6.45 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Head of Fine Art, Head of Media, QA/QI Officer

Day 2 of Review:

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 3			
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with QA/QI Officer and prepare for day
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	9.30 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet with any additional stakeholders they request
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	10.00 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	Lunch with QA Officer & Head of Media
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	2.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG complete draft report
Friday 29 th October	The Meeting Room	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG present recommendations of draft report to Director, Head of Fine Art and Head of Media

The opportunity for members of the team to meet informally on the first evening is highly commendable. The concentrated nature of the work demanded of a PRG makes this a very worthwhile investment, as it allows team spirit and a level of functional group cohesion to develop.

Though extremely tight and demanding, the timetable allowed the PRG to interview a comprehensive range of stakeholders. The structuring the process around interviews on the first day, with the second day given over almost completely to writing up findings worked very well. Generating a draft report takes several hours of sustained concentration. We felt the quantity of time allowed for this was essential to the quality and credibility of the report itself.

2. Peer Review Methodology

The Peer Review Group consisted of

- Pat Cooke, UCD (Chairperson)
- Dr. Tim O'Riley, Chelsea College of Art
- Aisling Prior, Arts Curator
- Teresa McKenna, NCAD

Individual members of the group focused particularly on those aspects of the review which were pertinent to their area of experience and expertise. Broadly speaking, this could be described as follows:

- Pat Cooke – general management and functional issues
- Tim O'Riley – technical expertise and insight into academic Media issues
- Aisling Prior – appreciation of artistic and general stakeholder issues
- Teresa McKenna – advice on the organisational culture of NCAD and offering insight into the realism and feasibility of proposals.

The Media self-assessment report was read in advance by all members of the PRG and Pat Cooke and Dr. O'Riley circulated some very helpful observations to all members of the PRG in advance. These observations included suggested quality indicators, questions and areas to explore.

Additional material was made available to the PRG on site. During the review meetings, all group members had an opportunity to ask questions so that all areas were adequately addressed. All members of the group took notes during meetings.

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 commendations and recommendations, 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, the Head of Faculty and the Head of Department at the end of the second day.

During the subsequent fortnight, the Chair, in collaboration with the other members of the PRG, finalized the report and sent it to the QA/QI officer, who in turn forwarded it to the Head of Department on 10th November 2010. The Department 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 Department of Media

The temporality of Media as an art form is central to Fine Art Media practice as is its relationship to recording, representation and the role of the Audience.

Media in the global sense is a myriad of platforms used to communicate to a mass audience; it is deeply rooted in the economic, political and cultural forms of any society.

In the Media Department, media practice has widely but not exclusively been articulated through photography, moving image, performance, action and interaction and through the relationship between the physical and the digital, the real and the virtual, the old and the new. There is an engagement with new technologies and machinery in the broader sense, investigations of the potentials for new images and experiences. Central to this are reflective practices that look at the influences of technology on our understanding and experience of the world. Fine Art Media teaching emphasises the terms of engagement for artist and audience rather than specific media.

A key area of scholarship is to address how technologies are not neutral carriers of content but, by design and by association, frame content in particular ways. Gaining an understanding in this area opens up a sphere of practice that brings the student from the particulars of a technology into the wide arena of life.

As technology and technical knowledge becomes more advanced and specialised, diverse forms of practice are prototyped – engineer artists, artist programmers, collaborations between artists and scientists. Collaboration is an element of practice that is understood as a learning contract. Media also looks at ways of encouraging students to learn for themselves by engaging in more diverse forms of online learning. The BA can be viewed as a toolbox of methodologies of learning that can be utilised more fully at MA level when the learnt experience translates to a practice / research that can lead to a rich practice-based research at PhD level.

The stated aims of the Media Department are:

- To provide a vibrant, creative and intellectually challenging environment for students.
- To educate students in contemporary art practice through a range of real, virtual and emerging media.
- To engage with the now and reference the past.
- To embrace new ways of making.
- To challenge the notion of custom and practice as passive.
- To be proactive in encouraging students to explore 'what else something can be' beyond their accepted norms and comfort zone thinking.
- To be proactive in relevant practice based research.
- To participate in the international contemporary art debate.
- To encourage students to expand their thinking and imagination beyond the obvious.
- To promote ongoing postgraduate study and research.

The stated objectives of the Media Department are:

- To produce a self sufficient, eclectically educated and resourceful potential artist.

- To strive to educate a student to a point where they are independent, imaginative, creative and radical thinkers. Artists and Artisans with a sense and view of the world that is inclusive, respectful and generous.
- To develop our postgraduate programmes to an internationally competitive standard.
- To maintain the standard of undergraduate education as we face economic challenges.
- To annually review and develop efficient teaching methodologies.

4. Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group

Feedback from students was powerful and stated that the Department was wholly committed to their welfare. Anthony Hobbs in particular was praised for his dedication and generosity. Technical and academic staff equally demonstrated a strong student-centred ethos and flexibility and commitment in helping students to see their projects through to completion.

We would like to acknowledge the exceptional quality of the self-assessment report. It was a candid, thorough and jargon-free exposition of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and afforded the PRG a very clear insight into the issues to be addressed.

The PRG was impressed by the level of engagement demonstrated throughout the interviews. While all contributors were conscious of the challenges facing the department, there was a general disposition to suggest positive and realistic solutions to these.

The headline issues raised by both the report and the majority of the contributors are:

- the lack of adequate and suitable studio space
- insufficient academic staffing levels

The spatial issue has a direct impact on the quality of the student experience. Students feel like “second-class citizens” because they perceive themselves to have less adequate space than other students in the Fine Art Faculty. They see this as representing a lack of confidence from NCAD in the Media Department.

There is a divergence of perception between the academic staff who believe that the primary function of the media programmes is to produce potential fine artists and the more diverse perception among students that participating in these programmes empowers a variety of career paths and outcomes. In so far as we have been able to identify a core distinction to the programmes offered by Media, it consists in the expectation that students will achieve a high base-level of competency and fluency in the language of analog and digital media. It was clear to us also that some students have chosen these courses primarily because of the technical competencies offered. We encountered a lively debate centering on the concept of ‘post-media’ in relation to contemporary art practice across the various departments of Fine Art. We would encourage the continuation of this dialogue among staff with a view to achieving greater clarity around programme outcomes, and developing a comprehensive vision of the types of graduate emerging from the Media department. It comes down to a question of striking the best balance between shaping students for a career in the fine arts and/or other equally valid career paths.

We are mindful that the recommendations within this report must be viewed within the context of the impending changes to structures and systems within the college which encompass a move to a 3+2(+3) programme and the alliance with UCD.

The Department has demonstrated a willingness to embrace change. However, it is clear that the issues identified in this review can only be resolved through a Faculty and College-wide commitment to addressing the specific challenges faced by Media. Achieving the goals of optimal use of space, staffing and resources, and most particularly equity of student experience, will require an open-minded examination of Department, Faculty and College structures.

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

5.1. Undergraduate Studies

5.1.1. Commendations

Given the overriding reality of the lack of lecturing staff, their generosity of spirit and goodwill is inspiring in the way it delivers, on the whole, a positive student experience.

Notwithstanding the space issue, students have articulated an otherwise positive response to their Media experience.

5.1.2. Recommendations

The lecturing staff/student ratio is a critical challenge at undergraduate level. The PRG noted that there are no academic staff available to students on Friday. There is some concern that the limited interface time of lecturers with students creates a vacuum in which students come to depend on technical staff for support and advice. Any review of staffing resources must take this into account at a Faculty level. A review of timetabling in the Department may help to address an element of this problem.

Careful thought will need to be given to defining the acceptable ratio between on-line learning and face-to-face learning. Above all, the PRG are concerned that on-line learning could become merely an expedient response to a shortage of space and staffing. Students strongly expressed to the PRG their desire to physically attend college, which is fundamental to the socialised collegiate experience that a third level education provides.

Arising from their discussions with the students and their visit to the Media Department, the PRG were struck by the very limited studio space available to the students, which includes virtually no wall space to show work in progress or source material. Visual practitioners need to be able to display their work-in-progress in dedicated studio spaces so that they can reflect on their own work and benefit from peer critique. In terms of the College's primary mission, the inability of any student to experiment and communicate visually as part of the group student experience should cause real concern.

5.2. Postgraduate Studies

5.2.1. Commendations

The postgraduate students appear to be reasonably well resourced in terms of space, equipment and access to technicians in comparison to other MA programmes in Ireland.

The engagement of the Media Department with postgraduate research is commendable.

The academic contribution of GradCAM to the research community in NCAD

is invaluable.

5.2.2. *Recommendations*

The PRG were particularly struck by the view strongly expressed by students at MA level that the *taught* masters in particular was failing to meet expectations in relation to the balance struck between self-directed learning and formal taught content. The PRG acknowledges, of course, that this is yet another instance where the lack of staff resource manifests itself. We recommend that either additional staff resource is provided and, if significant progress is not possible on this front, that some effort be made to manage expectations through promotional literature and in the way the programme is described and presented.

5.3. **Research**

5.3.1. *Commendations*

The PRG commends the commitment of the College to research-led teaching.

We also commend the College for its support of PhD students.

5.3.2. *Recommendations*

It was unclear to the PRG how staff research was supported within Media. The Group believes it desirable that the College provide supplementary academic cover for both part-time and full-time staff to allow them to avail of research opportunities. This will not only help to enhance staff research profiles but also provide a means of recognition and motivation.

5.4. **Facilities and Resources**

5.4.1. *Commendations*

The PRG highly commends the improvisational ingenuity of the Media staff in their utilization of the space and facilities available to the Department.

The PRG commends the black & white film processing, the 16mm film facilities, and the recent upgrade to high-end digital editing suites, all of which are a real asset to the Media Department. The proximity of the resources to the studios is also very beneficial to the students.

5.4.2. *Recommendations*

The students interviewed by the PRG wished to convey strongly that an erroneous impression appears to prevail that Media students do not need as much physical space as other art students.

The PRG endorses the view that Media students are entitled to an equitable and adequate amount of studio space to make work, which may frequently include 3-D elements.

The PRG recognises the merits of holding the end of year exhibition within the campus. However, the fact that student study space must be used for the end of year show can be disruptive. The college therefore needs to consider addressing this problem in terms of off-site solutions. One possible avenue of exploration is the opportunity offered by the NCAD-UCD alliance. This could be facilitated further by adopting the principle that the exhibition could be separate from the examination.

The PRG recognizes that all students have to purchase some equipment in relation to their courses. However, we were struck by the fact that the students we met were spending up to €2,500 on equipment in addition to their registration fee. The PRG recommends that this situation should be closely monitored to ensure that no student is marginalised through their inability to purchase essential equipment.

Given the significant level of expenditure likely to be incurred by the student, some prior warning of these costs should be given to prospective students.

5.5. Internal/External Relations

5.5.1. Recommendations

In achieving greater clarity around the student offering, and the type of graduate emerging from the Media department, some re-examination of promotional literature and handbooks may be needed.

We have already praised the information contained within the self-assessment report, but note some weakness in relation to external stakeholder analysis. There was very little reference to the present economic climate and the challenges this is now presenting to graduates in terms of employment and career opportunity. There was insufficient consideration of the academic competitors within other HEI's to the programmes offered by Media. Defining the unique academic experience and creative ethos offered by programmes within Media would be strengthened through analyzing and comparing them to equivalent offerings in other institutions.

Given the practitioner emphasis of the Media programmes, we were surprised to find that internship/placement opportunities are not supported to a greater extent. The PRG feel that there is much more potential to develop placements and internships as a major feature of the student experience, particularly to enhance professional skills within the postgraduate programmes. This will have the added benefit of strengthening a network of support for the Department in the growing cultural and media sectors.

The vagueness of the references within the report to relations with "the art world" prompts the PRG to encourage the Media department to work at proactively enhancing and extending its profile with contemporary art institutions, nationally and internationally. This might involve, for example, increased staff and student publications and exhibitions in contemporary art institutions or situations, and possibly greater involvement with the Head of Research.

5.6. Staffing and Staff Development

5.6.1. *Commendations*

The PRG commends the College's increased support to staff development over recent years.

All the students spoke very highly of the commitment, dedication and expertise of the technical staff. Due to the lack of lecturing hours there is an increased pressure on the technical staff which is yet another dimension of the insufficient staffing resource problem in Media.

5.6.2. *Recommendations*

Anthony Hobbs is the only full-time member of staff in Media and he is working in an Acting Head capacity with responsibility for 85 students in a growing Department. This is both unsatisfactory and unsustainable. The PRG recommends that the acting position be definitively resolved.

It was drawn to our attention that the budget for visiting lecturers to the Media department is virtually completely taken up with funding examination staffing costs. Many contributors emphasised to us that in the context of a practitioner programme, the richness and diversity of input from visiting practitioners and lecturers is vital. The desirability of having these practitioners available for tutorials was also stressed. Notwithstanding the resource constraints, we think this is a worthwhile goal and would fulfil the promise offered in the programme documentation.

To ensure that EPL/part-time staff are practically facilitated to participate in professional development through attending training and skills courses, every effort should be made to ensure that staff cover/resources are available.