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 Painting
2007

Peer Review Report and Preliminary Response

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COLÁISTE NÁISÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHA
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Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Peer Review Group Report
Department of Painting
Academic Year 2007/08

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by Painting in the academic year 2006/2007. The Peer Review site visit took place on 30th and 31st October 2007.

Members of the Peer Review Group:

1. Cynthia Deane, Options Consulting – Independent Chair

2. Mary Lohan

3. Pat Harris, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp

4. Dervil Jordan, Faculty of Education, NCAD - Internal Advisor

1.   Timetable of the site visit

Day	*Location*	*Time*	*Action*
Day 1			
29th October	Jury's Inn, Christchurch	6.00 p.m.	Pat Harris meets with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer
29th October	Fallon & Byrne 11-17 Exchequer Street Dublin 2	6.30 p.m.	QA/QI Officer & Pat Harris join rest of PRG - 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
30th October	Board Room	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer and prepare for day's sessions
30th October	Board Room	9.30 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet Director, Colm O Briain
30th October	Board Room	10.00 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Ken Langan, Registrar
30th October	Board Room	10.30 – 10.45 a.m.	PRG – private recap of meetings
30th October	Board Room	10.45 – 11.15 a.m.	PRG meet with Kevin Atherton, Acting Head of Faculty of Fine Art.
30th October	Board Room	11.15 – 11.30 a.m.	Coffee/tea x 7
30th October	Board Room	11.30 – 12.00 noon	PRG meet with Robert Armstrong, Head of Painting to discuss Department and respond to any questions regarding the Self-assessment Report (SAR).
30th October	Board Room	12.00 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG meet with Department staff: Diana Copperwhite – Lecturer p/t Susan MacWilliam – Lecturer p/t & MFA coordinator Chris Maguire – Lecturer p/t Madeleine Moore – Lecturer p/t Paul Nugent – Lecturer p/t Enda Walshe – Technical Assistant f/t Oliver Whelan – Lecturer f/t
30th October	Board Room	1.00 – 1.30 p.m.	Lunch – PRG & QA/QI Officer
30th October	Board Room	1.30 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG prepare for afternoon sessions
30th October	Board Room	2.00 – 2.30 p.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Student Representatives: Year 2 B.A. Chanelle Walsh & Catriona Rogerson Year 3 B.A. Sam Keogh & Francis Wasser Year 4 B.A. Ian O'Neill & Lee Welch
30th October	Board Room	2.30 – 3.00 p.m.	PRG meet with postgraduate Student Representatives: Year 1 MFA Ramon Kassam Year 2 MFA Louise Neiland & Damien Flood
30th October	Board Room	3.00 – 3.30 p.m.	PRG and QA/QI Officer - Private recap on student session Tea/Coffee
30th October	Board Room	3.30 – 4.00 p.m.	PRG meet with MFA Coordinator, Susan MacWilliam
30th October	Painting & College	4.00 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG, Acting Head of Faculty & Head of Painting tour Department and related College facilities, Core, Library.
30th October	Board Room	5.15 – 6.00 p.m.	Private re-cap on day's sessions with QA Officer
30th October	Eden Restaurant	6.30 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Acting Head of Faculty, Head of Painting, QA/QI Officer

Day	Location	Time	Action
Day 3			
31st October	Board Room	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with QA/QI Officer and prepare for day
31st October	Board Room	9.30 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet Francis Halsall and Declan Long (facilitator) - Visual Culture representatives
31st October	Board Room	10.00 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Joe Wilson, Head of Core Studies
31st October	Board Room	10.30 – 1.30 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer (the QA Officer will be shadowed by Hazel Poland for training purposes)
31st October	Board Room	1.30 – 2.00 p.m.	Working Lunch with QA Officer and Hazel Poland
31st October	Board Room	2.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG complete draft report (the QA Officer will be shadowed by Hazel Poland for training purposes)
31st October	Board Room	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG present recommendations of draft report to Director, Registrar, Head of Painting and QA/QI Officer

While the schedule was very full, the meetings were well organised and the group was able to follow the allocated timetable.

For future peer reviews, it is suggested that it might be useful to schedule a short preparatory working session on the first day, perhaps for two hours before the dinner. This would give more opportunity for the group to discuss the specific areas that they want to explore during the meetings on the following days, and to formulate relevant questions. It is difficult to do this in a noisy and crowded restaurant.

2.   Peer Review Methodology

The Peer Review Group (PRG) had an independent Chair, Cynthia Deane, who was appointed by the College. 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 meetings with staff and students.

During the meetings on the two following days, all group members had an opportunity to ask questions so that all areas were adequately addressed. Staff and students were also invited to make additional comments or observations at the end of the 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 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, Registrar, Head of Department 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 Head of Department on 3rd December 2007. 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 Painting

3.1   Overview:

Painting is the largest of the four departments within the Faculty of Fine Art in NCAD. The other departments are Fine Print, Media and Sculpture. The department guides students through 2nd, 3rd and 4th years of a four-year degree course; Core Studies is the common first year of all NCAD undergraduate courses.

All academic and technical staff members are practising artists and all maintain their own research and/or professional practice. Staffing within the department consists of three full-time and five part-time lecturers and one full-time technician.

3.2   Department Philosophy:

The philosophy of the Painting Department aims to promote the professional development of practising artists. It aims to provide successful graduates with a sustainable studio methodology, which equips them to continue their development and career within the world of visual art and the wider cultural community.

The student-centred course, which is flexible and responsive, promotes enquiry, exploration and independent thinking about fine art. Practice and theory are integrated to allow students to reflect critically on issues and concerns, which motivate their individual practice. The Painting Department does not support any particular orthodoxy or house-style and is careful to encourage a genuinely pluralist approach to fine art practice.

Consistent with the student-centred approach, and responsive to the constant flux of contemporary art practice, the Painting Department adopts a wide definition of what painting practice may include. This ranges from the traditional painting methodologies to include 2D, 3D and 4D work arising from the critical and contextual concerns of individual students. Departmental staff members, all of whom are practising artists, offer a wide range of approaches and expertise to encourage and support students in the development of their particular 'visual voices'. Visiting artists from many disciplines further enhance this process.

The studio environment is a central strategic element of the course, by which students from 2nd year onwards and most particularly in final year BA are expected to regard their studio space as a near-professional studio, and develop work strategies accordingly. The quality and size of the spaces increase in scale as the year's progress, and at MA level studios are regarded as professional spaces.

The educational value of a good peer-group experience is fostered through regular seminars, group critiques and discussions, where students are encouraged to locate their ideas and practice in relation to contemporary debate on cultural and theoretical issues. The social and educational value of study trips is important in this context also.

A culture of research is encouraged throughout the BA experience and is expected at MA and PhD level.

The philosophy of the Painting Department at undergraduate and post-graduate level can be summarised in the following aims and objectives:

Aims

- To create conditions where students can gain a broad and wide-ranging interpretation of the role and function of contemporary painting in a stimulating learning environment.

- To foster individualism within each and every student, so that their practice avoids house-style/s and fashionable trends, but rather honestly reflects themselves and their interests, as unique individuals.
- To encourage the student to consider the moral and ethical role of the artist in relation to the contemporary world.
- To encourage the student to consider the 'relational aesthetics' of their studio practice, in regard to strategies of display, audience engagement and the construction of meaning and inter-artist/audience-discourses
- To encourage the student to contribute to 'original knowledge'.

Objectives

- To ensure that on completion of degrees students have the proven capacity to engage as professional artists in the cultural domain.
- To provide the student with a transportable and sustainable 'professional' approach to studio methodology and general working practices.
- To provide the student with the capacity to make informed critical; aesthetic, philosophical, logical and contextualized decisions in relation to their practical studio practice.
- To facilitate the student to be able to describe and discuss their studio practice.
- To provide the student with a realistic and deconstructed view of the contemporary visual arts industry – to help them facilitate decision making in regard to their potential position and role in such as a practicing visual arts professional.
- To enable the student to be aware of all practical aspects of artistic professional life, such as: researching, archiving, documentation, proposal / critical and research grant-writing, logistical planning, budgeting, time-management, tax, insurance, art shipping & storage, and other related legal issues.
- To develop the ability of students to work as part of a group.

4.   Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group

The Peer Review Group considers this to be a talented, energetic and enthusiastic department that is committed to achieving high standards in art education. Through discussions with staff in the College it is evident that the Painting Department is well respected throughout NCAD. It is also evident that there is strong goodwill towards the Painting Department among the fine art community and this is demonstrated in particular through the high calibre of the external examiners who are involved in assessing students' work each year.

The department staff used the quality assurance process to help them reflect on the educational processes they are engaged in and how well the curriculum implements their philosophy. It is clear that the quality assurance process engaged everyone in the department and that there is a genuine commitment among staff to follow through to the quality improvement phase.

The Peer Review Group found the self-assessment report very informative and well-written and considered that in some respects it underplayed the strengths of the department. However, the group also noted a couple of shortcomings in the report. Firstly, it was somewhat inward-looking, and it is suggested that future reports need to look outwards at the world of art today and analyse the changing environment where their graduates will find a livelihood. Secondly, to complement the outward-looking perspective, it would be useful for the department to undertake systematic follow-up on the destination of graduates after a number of years. This will help to identify ways in which the curriculum might need to adapt to prepare students for a range of future careers as artists.

The Peer Review Group hopes that this report will help the Department formulate its quality improvement plan.

Department Preliminary Response:

The Painting Department staff welcome the report of the Peer Review Group. We thank Cynthia Deane (Chair), Mary Lohan, Pat Harris and Dervil Jordan for their deliberation and also Nicky Saunders for her support during the process.

The Department is gratified that the PRG considered us to be 'a talented, energetic and enthusiastic department that is committed to achieving high standards in art education'. We noted also that the report supports change as suggested in the self-assessment report in aspects of course structure, communication and delivery. Some of this change is already under way and the PRG report will be of assistance to the department to further enhance this change.

The comments of the PRG report regarding the self-assessment report 'being somewhat inward looking' is a cause of concern to the department. The self-assessment report was directly focussed on the internal workings of the department and on the things that were within the control of the department. The department feels in retrospect that the self-assessment document could have included more material to illustrate that quite extensive contacts with the wider art world do exist. We welcome the PRG recommendation for future reports to look beyond the department to the wider art world especially in the context of career opportunities and curriculum development.

Robert Armstrong
Head of Painting

11/2/08

5.   Report of the Peer Review Group (areas of strength and areas for development)

5.1.   Department Philosophy and approach to Teaching & Learning

5.1.1.   The PRG commends the sustainable studio philosophy and pluralism of approach, together with the student-centred approach to teaching and learning.

5.1.2.   The Department has clear and well-expressed aims and objectives and a good programme of visiting lecturers which broadens the cultural framework.

5.1.3.   The new tutorial recording system appears to be a good initiative – it is clear and transparent for students and tutors.

5.1.4.   The Department could explore different ways of teaching – group, one-to-one, peer learning etc. The PRG encourages the inclusion of Visual Culture into the group tutorial system. The PRG recommends a more visible, structured and systematic timetable of tutorials to differentiate between the formal and informal tutorials/discussions.

5.1.5.   Group critiques are an essential element in all years and are to be commended – the PRG recommends the follow-up by email as happens in the MA to provide a record of the critiques, to facilitate a response from students and to help in the presentation and articulation of ideas.

5.1.6.   Visual Culture is becoming more integrated into the degree course; this is a good development that ensures better coherence.

5.1.7.   Professional Practice lectures add an important dimension to the course.

5.1.8.   The Fine Art Faculty is to be commended for its initiative in establishing the Masters' degree in Fine Arts (MFA) and the excellent content, coordination and organisation of the postgraduate programme. The PRG notes that the students are benefiting greatly from this experience. The PRG commends the good model of communication in the MFA.

5.1.9.   The PRG supports the Department's intention to introduce elements of Professional Practice earlier in the course. Documentation of work and proposal-writing will be introduced in 3rd year to facilitate all students but especially those making applications for Erasmus exchange.

5.1.10.   While the department's aims and objectives are commendable, there needs to be a clear link between the aims and objectives, the learning outcomes of the courses and the measurement of the outcomes. There is a need to constructively align aims/ objectives/ learning outcomes/ assessment.

5.1.11.   The PRG recommends that the department revise curricula to make sure they include learning outcomes. As currently written, the curriculum for 2nd year is vague and very input-based, while in the 4th year curriculum, the learning outcomes of the professional practice module are not specified and should be included.

5.1.12. The BA course needs to include more of the technological aspects of painting; health and safety should be included (mediums, solvents, pigments, canvas priming etc.) There should be more tuition about the language and discipline of painting - is not clear within the report that it is included within the curriculum.

5.1.13. Balance should be found in what the student is looking for and what the discipline demands (specific skills development). A better balance should be sought between the *language and discipline* of painting and the *content or concept*.

5.1.14. There is not enough peer group experience for students.

5.1.15. There could be more Visual Culture interaction in the studio and vice versa – curation of the third year show by Visual Culture would be a start to this interaction.

5.1.16. The Department should take ownership and responsibility regarding the students' demand for more "skills" teaching. In particular, IT skills need to be taught to the students.

> ***Department Preliminary Response:***
> *The department notes the comments of the PRG regarding technical skills delivery in the department. We wish to point out that the unusually high number of mature students (64%) in 4th year during the QA process may be connected to student feedback requests for more technical/skills training on the course. The department is acutely conscious of the need for balance on the course between conceptual and technical training and will keep the PRG Report comments on this matter under constant review.*

5.1.17. The PRG supports the Department's decision to introduce more group seminars in 4th year, and to deliver more formal lectures on specific topics, such as study trips, exhibitions etc. in all years.

5.1.18. The PRG agrees that the Department should support its plurality of approach through part-time staff and visiting lecturer input.

5.2.   Recruitment and selection of students; follow-up of graduates

5.2.1. The PRG encourages Painting staff input into Core final module assessment. This will help identify students who are most suited to painting.

5.2.2. It is not wise to reduce BA numbers to make room for the MFA as that may ultimately reduce the applications to MFA. Other possible opportunities could arise from restructuring the course as a three- year BA followed by a two-year MA.

5.2.3. The challenge for Painting is to grow the MFA within the existing space constraints – the Harry Clarke building may ease some of the space constraints.

5.2.4. The establishment of a specialised Painting MFA, which is suggested in the self-assessment report, should be given more thought and research as to the likely future demand. In particular the department and the faculty should consider how it would sit beside the existing MFA and the availability of resources to sustain both strands.

5.2.5. The Department has expressed an interest in attracting more direct entry students. The PRG recommends that if Painting wants more external students, perhaps they could concentrate on the postgraduate element and look at ways to attract postgraduate students (as outlined above).

5.2.6. More systematic follow-up on Graduates from the Department would help it to take a more outward-looking view. There are graduate tracking systems that the Department can follow.

> ***Department Preliminary Response:***
> *The ever-increasing use of email has greatly facilitated the department's ongoing contact with students and graduates. The department notes the PRG report comments in regard to systematic tracking of graduates to help align curricula to real world imperatives. The department will systematically follow up on graduates and link with the college-wide graduate network.*

5.3.   Communication and External Linkages

5.3.1. The PRG commends the Faculty initiative to set up a Faculty sub-committee: this will improve linkage between departments and help to achieve more coherent integration of visual culture within the fine art curriculum.

5.3.2. More systematic time and thought should go into planning/dialogue and consistent communication. The department might consider having scheduled staff days through the year dedicated to planning and review.

5.3.3. Strengthen the links between the Faculty and national institutions such as IMMA – explore how the resources in IMMA could enrich the students' learning experience.

5.3.4. Erasmus programme: the quality of partner institutes should be reviewed and feedback gathered from students returning from exchange. Use Moodle/email to keep in touch with students abroad. The use of CD and DVD to interview returning students appears too time-consuming and may not have a long shelf-life.

5.3.5. The PRG supports the Department's recommendation that its staff begin to systematically visit Erasmus partner colleges to gain information and establish the benefits or otherwise of sending students to them.

5.3.6. Explore other possible avenues to develop placements. It is important that there are clear learning outcomes, monitoring of the placement and evaluation of students feedback.

5.3.7. The student email facility should be used for all college business. Set up the College email accounts to ensure that they are reliable. It should be compulsory for staff and students for all college business.

5.3.8. The PRG supports the Department's recommendation that it establishes a formal method of eliciting feedback on a regular basis from student representatives in each year group.

5.3.9. The PRG agrees with the Department that updating and expanding on the content of the website will increase the use of the website, improve the Department's profile and provide efficient and effective communications to the outside world.

5.3.10. Build on the existing contacts with the art world.

5.3.11. The new Student Handbook is a good development, which is commended. The handbook could be updated regularly on the intranet and by student email. The Handbook should also contain an academic timetable for the Painting Department to provide structure and consistency across the years.

5.4. Staffing

5.4.1.   The staff of the department are committed, engaged and ambitious for the Department.

5.4.2.   The vacant lecturer post has had an impact on the work of the department, in particular the Head of Department, and this deficit needs to be addressed urgently. The PRG recommends that the College should make two new appointments immediately as indicated by the Director.

5.4.3.   The Department should maintain flexibility of staffing by not confining the post-holders to work as a tutor for one year of the course only.

5.4.4.   The PRG notes the gender imbalance in staff.

5.4.5.   Consider a re-titling of the role of *year tutor* to *year coordinator*. Ensure flexibility in the role and rotate staff to allow people take responsibility for coordinating different years of the course.

5.4.6.   The Painting Department has agreed to establish a schedule of regular staff meetings. The PRG cautions against holding meetings just for meetings' sake but recommends that there is clear purpose and follow-up to each meeting.

5.4.7.   There is a need for more administrative support as modularisation has, and no doubt in the future will, generate a lot more administration work.

5.4.8.   Staff members have a good research track record and the Department is well placed to continue its success and to bring in research funding.

5.4.9.   There need to be visible rewards for research-active staff at College level, which are clearly communicated to part-time as well as full-time staff.

5.5. Facilities and Resources

5.5.1.   There is a need for improved co-ordination of common spaces, technical facilities and support services at college level; this would enhance the facilities available to the department for more group-based work. A college co-ordinator to take responsibility for space and facilities might be a suggestion.

5.5.2.   While the students seem happy with the space it was noted that spaces are small in 2nd year studios and storage may become an issue later on in the year.

5.5.3.   There is an absence of basic painting equipment in studios; this is not in keeping with the department's aspiration to provide a professional working environment.

5.5.4.   To achieve the professional presentation of the degree show the department should consider external presentation of the show.

5.5.5.   Library – the books and resources are excellent but the lack of seats needs to be urgently addressed.

5.5.6.   The leaks and recurring problems with the roof should be investigated and addressed as a matter of urgency.

5.5.7.   The PRG recommends:
- the replacement of the twenty year old wheeled cabinet/worktop lockers in 3rd and 4th year studios.

- purchasing new chairs for Painting Department Seminar Room.
- replacing tables
- improved storage for students
- providing a chair for each studio space
- each student should have a work station locker, easel, palette etc. to provide a professional working environment.

Acknowledgements

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