



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
Sculpture
February/March 2009**

Peer Review Report

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. Timetable of Site Visit	3
2. Peer Review Methodology	6
3. Overview of the Department of Sculpture	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
Department of Sculpture
Academic Year 2008/09

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by the Department of Sculpture in the academic year 2007/8. The Peer Review site visit took place on 23rd and 24th February, 2009.

Date: 22nd, 23rd & 24th February 2009

Location: Conference Room 1, Harry Clarke House, NCAD

Peer Review Group: Professor Áine Hyland (Chair)

Professor Anne Tallentire, Central St. Martin's

Caoimhín Corrigan, Arts Officer, Leitrim & Artistic Director, The Dock

Gearóid O'Conchubhair, Internal Advisor, NCAD

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
<i>Day 1</i>			
Sunday 22 nd February	Jury's Inn, Christchurch	5.30 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
Sunday 22 nd February	The Mermaid Café 69/70 Dame Street, Dublin 2 Tel: 6708236	7.00 p.m.	PRG & QA/QI Officer - Informal dinner

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 2			
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer and prepare for sessions
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	9.30 – 10.15a.m.	PRG meet Director, Professor Declan McGonagle & Ken Langan, Registrar
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	10.15 – 10.30 a.m.	PRG – private recap of meeting
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	10.30 – 11.00a.m.	PRG meet with Professor Brian Maguire, Head of Faculty of Fine Art.
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	11.00 – 11.15 a.m.	Coffee/tea x 7
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	11.15 – 12.00 noon	PRG meet with Philip Napier, Head of Sculpture to discuss Department and respond to any questions regarding the Self-assessment Report (SAR).
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	12.00 – 12.15 p.m.	PRG – private recap of meetings
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	12.15 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG meet with Department staff: Brendan Begley, TA Pauline Cummins, Lecturer John Kavanagh, TA Philip Kelly, IT TA Alanna O'Kelly, Lecturer Mick O'Kelly, Lecturer Louise Walsh, Lecturer
Monday 23 rd February	Oak Room	1.00 – 1.45 p.m.	Light lunch with Sculpture Staff
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	1.45 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG prepare for afternoon sessions
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	2.00 – 2.30 p.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Student Representatives: Year 2 B.A: Andreas Kindler von Knobloch Year 3 B.A: Niamh Moriarty Year 4 B.A: Sandra Johnston
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	2.30 – 3.00 p.m.	PRG meet with postgraduate Student Representatives: Year 1 MFA: Adam Boulton Year 2 MFA: Cecelia Bullock PhD: Sarah Dunne
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	3.00 – 3.15 p.m.	PRG and QA/QI Officer - Private recap on student sessions Tea/Coffee x 5
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	3.15 – 3.45 p.m.	PRG meet with Dr. Siun Hanrahan, Head of Research & PG Development and GradCAM Fellow, Kevin Atherton
Monday 23 rd February	NCAD Campus Tour	3.45 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG & Head of Sculpture tour Department and related College facilities, Core, Library.
Monday 23 rd February	Conference Room 1	4.30 – 5.15 p.m.	PRG meet with Sarah Tuck from CREATE, Sheena Barrett from Dublin City Council and graduates of Sculpture: Dominic Thorpe, Glenn Loughran, Sinead McCann, Seamus Nolan, Michelle Browne, Tara Kennedy, Joanne Butler, Ciara Brophy
Monday 23 rd February	Fallon & Byrne Restaurant	6.45 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Head of Faculty, Head of Sculpture, QA/QI Officer

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 3			
Tuesday, 24 th February	Conference Room 1	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with QA/QI Officer and prepare for day
Tuesday, 24 th February	Conference Room 1	9.30 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet Visual Culture representative, Declan Long and Joe Wilson, Head of Core Studies
Tuesday, 24 th February	Conference Room 1	10.00 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer
Tuesday, 24 th February	Oak Room	1.00 – 2.00 p.m.	Lunch with QA Officer
Tuesday, 24 th February	Conference Room 1	2.00 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG complete draft report
Tuesday, 24 th February	Conference Room 1	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG present recommendations of draft report to Director, Registrar, Head of Sculpture, Head of Faculty and available Sculpture staff

Comments of PRG:

While the schedule was very full, the meetings were efficient and well organized and the group kept to the allocated timetable. The order of the meetings worked well – starting with senior management and working through to students, graduates and external stakeholders. The enthusiasm of the students, graduates and stakeholders at the end of the first day re-invigorated the Review Group at the end of a busy day. The time allowed for each meeting ensured that the PRG paid equal respect to each group.

The tour of the facilities in the afternoon of the 23rd was rather rushed but as all members of the PRG had some familiarity with NCAD facilities, the time allocated was adequate for this particular PRG. However, as the Resin Room was closed (due to storing and laying out Admissions Portfolios) it was not possible for the PRG to visit this space which is normally a key space for the Sculpture Department.

2. Peer Review Methodology

The Peer Review Group (PRG) had an independent Chair, Áine Hyland, 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, graduates 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, the Registrar the Head of Faculty, the Head of Department and staff at the end of the second day.

During the subsequent weeks, 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 23rd March 2009. 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. Sculpture Overview

The Department of Sculpture is a department of the Fine Art Faculty. The Faculty also includes the Departments of Media, Painting and Print. The Departments are differentiated less by fundamental titles and material associations, and more by differences in ethos and interrogations of practice and research.

The Sculpture Department caters for undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral students. The Department has a range of academic staff who contribute towards the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This includes BA, MFA by Research, MA Contemporary World and PhD supervision.

The practice of Sculpture is fundamentally concerned with aspects of space and time. Sculpture has a material and formal inheritance located within the power of place-making and monumental tradition, and a range of familiar fundamental languages and processes. In the last century the critical interrogation of formal aesthetic properties of space and the appropriation of time-based processes resulted in the transformation of sculptural languages and processes. This effort continues to create new vantage points and new spaces in the rapidly shifting landscapes of our time. An understanding of our inheritance and its transformation is critical to renewal, relevance and new knowledge.

The Department of Sculpture has a vivid, dynamic and energetic character and there are ongoing debates and dialogue amongst staff, between staff and students and between students about the nature of practice, the content of work and the potential for development.

Within the contemporary field of sculptural practice and in the public realm, there are expanded forms that negotiate space, place, authorship and audience. These four descriptors are key components of developing scholarship. This requires that the department evolves new methodologies for practice and provides platforms for the scholarship of students and staff, recognising the complex series of relationships and communications at work in navigating intersections with 'real world' contexts.

The idea of 'expanded practice' invigorates debate around the 'given' art trajectories of the studio to the gallery as the primary sites of production and distribution. This does not privilege alternative contexts but notes that the gallery 'frame' is one frame within a wide spectrum of possibilities that can be chosen and accessed. The evolution of the languages that are used to describe these activities is also particular and necessary.

In the last few years the Department has undertaken a substantial repositioning of its activities in line with contemporary art practice, in its relationships to other departments and faculties within the campus and with other agencies, institutions and establishments outside our campus.

The complex and rapidly evolving landscape demands the commissioning of new attitudes and a renegotiation of appropriate skills for engagement. It requires new partnerships and interdisciplinary learning from within and outside the University context. This in turn places research as central to department activities. The idea of the laboratory finds new currency in art academic language. At its root is the scientific model of experiment and test from which the practice-based PhD has grown to contest rigid frames and formats of new knowledge. The department understands practice-based research to be a matrix of activity, discovery, reflection, communication, and participation.

Core values within the department centre on the creation of situations and contexts to support a culture of prototyping. A rigorous testing of how things might actually be made to matter takes place. This is supported by practically linking theory and practice in a range of different production situations.

Aims and Objectives

The course aims of the Department of Sculpture are:

- to equip graduates to function as practising artists and cultural practitioners in the real world
- to create a culture of 'risk taking' in student and staff practice
- to equip students for access to postgraduate study and new knowledge and an awareness of 4th level research
- to create an environment of critical enquiry
- to unroll a culture of renewal in terms of plant, capacity, flexibility and mobility to 'dock on' to contexts of interest
- to offer students supported practical experiences of different contexts for contemporary practice consistent with forces and themes in contemporary art debate.

Course objectives are:

- to provide awareness of critical debate and the ability to practically engage.
- to foster the development of students towards independent, self-aware cultural practitioners who are able to contextualize and communicate their activities in terms of critical debate, and contemporary society.
- to encourage work and process to be framed by gallery-based and expanded public realm 'real world' contexts by developing partnerships, projects and opportunities for students to test their practice
- to introduce students to the language of fundamental sculptural materials and processes
- to foster independent learning and initiatives
- to broaden an understanding of appropriate skills and foster a range of skills appropriate to their enquiry.

The Department offers to all students a conceptual and practical grounding in a range of processes and projects which together address the wide body of issues of contemporary space, both private and public, of collaborative nature and process and of signature object.

4. Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group

The PRG was very impressed by the leadership and ambition for the Department of Sculpture provided by the Head of Department. The PRG was also impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff – academic and technical. Overall, the impression given by students was one of contentment and satisfaction with a high level of creative engagement and activity.

The distinctive philosophy, ethos and approach of the Sculpture Department are key to the delivery of core elements of NCAD's strategic plan in relation to the interface between the college and the world beyond the college.

At a time of potential restructuring of the college, the PRG acknowledges the importance – as stated in the SAR – of “an awareness of (a) discipline and a mode of practice that brings something particular to education”.

In the documentation submitted before and during the visit of the PRG, there was clear evidence of an impressive depth and breadth of contemporary sculpture practice. Examples of the diversity of practice are provided in the booklet, produced by the Department of Sculpture in collaboration with Finglas Youth Resource Centre, on the BA and the MA programme.

The intake of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and from internal and external sources is healthy, both in terms of quality and quantity.

The PRG was impressed by the extent to which NCAD as an institution has embraced the Bologna process. This was evident in the course (and module) descriptors where modularization, ECTS and learning outcomes have been adopted across the board, as well as in the quality processes and culture which are evident across the College. NCAD is to be particularly commended on the extent of its involvement with the Erasmus programme – a significant number of students (both incoming and outgoing) are involved in Erasmus exchanges and the benefits of Europeanization are evident in many aspects of the College's work. The PRG was also impressed with NCAD's role in GradCAM.

The active and ongoing involvement of the staff and students of the Department of Sculpture with the external environment is notable. The PRG notes the links and partnerships which have been forged with CREATE, DCC and other bodies. The creative involvement of the Department with external agencies is highly commended.

The issue of inadequate space was raised by a large number of staff and students. It was pointed out that student numbers have grown but that Department space has shrunk through a number of different developments over the years. While recognizing the difficulties for the College in relation to space management, and in particular in finding more space for Sculpture, the PRG will suggest (in the next section) a number of possible solutions where more effective use of space might be possible. The Head of Department has some creative ideas which the PRG recommends that the College might support.

The PRG noted the growing commitment of the College and of the Department of Sculpture to participating in “Fourth Level Ireland” i.e. to a growth and development of graduate education and research where appropriate and feasible. Attention was drawn to some new creative and innovative initiatives under this heading.

5. Report of the Peer Review Group

5.1.	Academic Matters
	<i>Commendations</i>
	The PRG was impressed by the overall coherence of understanding and appreciation (from senior management through to graduates) of the vision of the Department of Sculpture.
	The Director's vision of the NCAD graduate as "creative citizen" is manifest in the work of the Department of Sculpture.
	Inspiring leadership is provided by the Head of the Sculpture Department (the PRG notes with satisfaction that the position has been made permanent since the SAR was prepared).
	The PRG commends the energy and commitment of the academic staff – who are exceptionally supportive of students and graduates.
	The PRG notes the wide range of expertise and commitment within the staff.
	The PRG was very impressed by the outstanding contribution to the Department (staff and students) of the Technical Officers.
	The PRG noted the extent to which staff have provided creative leadership and action externally.
	The positive and enthusiastic attitude of students is impressive – they are very engaged, reflective and articulate.
	The Department is taking a leadership role in the creative development of contemporary sculpture.
	The PRG noted the diversity of teaching and learning methods - which encourage innovation and creativity.
	The PRG was impressed by the ongoing relationship of staff with graduates of the u/g course, many of whom retain a connection with NCAD.
	The engagement by Sculpture students with Visual Culture is having a positive impact on practice and theory.
	The quality of student "work in progress" viewed by the PRG was of a high standard and clearly informed by rigorous, critical research and independent thought. It was supported by excellent teaching.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	There is a need to ensure that the potential of modularization is fully exploited.
	The PRG recommends that the college supports further exploration of shared teaching and learning between Sculpture and Visual Culture.
	Skills and Knowledge around materials could be more strongly contextualised.
	A number of graduates suggested that a 'Professional practice' module would benefit greatly from being more discipline-specific.
	The Department should continue to negotiate the relationship between the virtual and the material to reflect the changing landscape and the use of technology.
	The PRG suggest that Sculpture and Media continue to pursue their productive relationship.
	Further opportunities for peer learning should be exploited both within and across levels.
	There is a need to improve on the time it takes to mark and provide feedback on student assignments.
5.1.2.	Research
	<i>Commendations</i>
	The PRG commends the work being done by the NCAD Research Committee in devising research metrics which will begin to reflect the high level of academic practice-based research being done by the staff in the department.

	The success of the Department in attracting research funding for the 'Network Informality' research project is commended
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	Staff need to document outcomes of high level practice-based research and should be supported to disseminate those outcomes.
	The Department should exploit every possible avenue to source funding for staff research.
	Internal communications might be improved to ensure that all staff and postgraduate students are aware of potential sources of both external and internal funding.
	There is a need to ensure that research informs practice in teaching and learning i.e. that there is an integration of research and teaching and learning.
	Intellectual Property protocols need to be put in place.
	The College should consider setting up a College-wide ethics committee.
5.1.3.	Postgraduate Studies
	<i>Commendations</i>
	PRG commends the rapid growth and development of postgraduate studies within the Department and the positive response of staff to this development.
	PRG is impressed by the success of the Department in attracting high-level, external graduates to its postgraduate courses.
	GradCAM has built up in a very short time an impressive suite of taught modules shared by postgraduate students and staff from all the partner institutions.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	The Department should exploit every possible avenue to source funding for postgraduate students.
	The College and the Department should continue to work towards a situation whereby postgraduate students will play a role in supporting the teaching of undergraduate students as is common across other HEI'S subject to agreement with relevant unions.
	The PRG supports the recommendation within the SAR for further discussion on the relationships of the various masters courses and the synergies, potential common admission, examination processes and course lengths.
	The College and the Department should ensure that strong recruitment processes are in place to attract high-quality postgraduates from elsewhere.
5.2.	External Activities
	<i>Commendations</i>
	The strong links with external agencies are exemplary. The PRG especially commends the involvement of undergraduate students in the external activities.
	The initiative of staff in identifying and implementing external community projects is impressive.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	The College and the Department must use every opportunity to publicise and celebrate the high level of external activity, and the contribution of current and past students and staff to the field of contemporary art practice.
5.3.	Facilities and Resources
	<i>Commendations</i>
	The PRG commends the workshop spaces and the reflexive way they have been managed and are working.
	The PRG was impressed by the various learning resources available in the Library.
	Sharing of College-wide resources is beneficial to all e.g. Roland Print room and other

	workshop facilities.
	The digitisation of visual materials in the Library will provide an important widely available resource for all interested in Art education.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	PRG supports the Department idea to develop a flexible and mobile resource that would further some of the ambitions and activities of the Department.
	The PRG noted that the Resin room is currently being used as a secure storage and presentation space for applicants' portfolios. It recommends that an alternative location should be found for these portfolios so as not to interrupt the academic progression of students in the Sculpture Department.
	The Sculpture Department urgently requires additional space for the presentation of large- and small-scale work in progress. This try-out space could possibly be accommodated within the atrium or resin room.
	The PRG supports the SAR recommendation to identify a space for a "clean room".
	Recognising the relative scarcity of space overall in NCAD, the PRG suggests that use of existing space in the Department of Sculpture (including the more flexible use of storage space) be investigated to improve the working environment and to optimize the use of space.
	There may be a need for senior management to clarify, and define more clearly, the access to and use of some shared spaces in the College e.g. the space known as "the shed".
	There is an urgent need for some administrative support to relieve academic staff (in particular the Head) and to facilitate the ongoing development of external relationships and off-campus activities.
	The problem of the external studio doors needs to be resolved in order to facilitate vehicular access and better use of space.
	The installation of an effective extraction system in the sculpture workshop is a matter of priority and is a Health and Safety concern.
5.4.	Communication
	<i>Commendations</i>
	Informal communications within the Department seem to be very good.
	The PRG commend recent publications, in particular the BA/MA Sculpture brochure.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	While the PRG is aware that the mechanisms are in place for the involvement of students in College structures, from the SAR it would appear that this is not fully exploited by Sculpture students and the PRG recommend student participation on college fora and at meetings.
	There is room for improvement in internal college communications e.g. staff and students need access to information regarding research grants and funding etc.
	The College and the Department should publicise and celebrate the high level of external activity and contribution of current and past students and staff to the field of contemporary art practice.

5.5.	Staff Development
	<i>Commendations</i>
	The PRG recognises the high level of the individual practices of academic staff and the continuing commitment of technical officers to their own on-going development.
	<i>Recommendations</i>
	At a time of rapid change and in an era of life-long learning, it is important that staff (academic and technical) are encouraged and supported by Senior Management to avail of every opportunity to develop their skills across the range of their responsibilities i.e. teaching and learning, research, practice.
	Opportunities should be encouraged for sharing the impressive expertise of staff in Sculpture with others (and vice versa).

Acknowledgements:

The PRG would like to record its thanks to everyone involved in this review for their co-operation and support. In particular it would like to record its appreciation of the efficiency and help provided by Nicky Saunders QA/QI Officer before, during and after the visit.