

University College Dublin

	Quality	/ Im	prov	ement	Plan
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UCD School of Philosophy

July 2015

1. Introduction

The UCD School of Philosophy underwent a quality review in 2014-2015. The site visit took place from 23-26 March 2015. The School received our Report from the Review Group a month later, and wrote our response to it. The Final Report, with our response, was sent to us at the end of May, and we decided to start work on the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) right away. Parallel to the preparation of the QIP, the UCD University Management Team and UCD Governing Authority are considering the final Review Group Report, after which the Review Group Report will be published on the UCD Quality Office website.

The Quality Improvement Committee comprised Prof. Rowland Stout (Head of School), Prof. James O'Shea (current Deputy Head and Head of School from 1 September 2015), Ms Helen Kenny (School Manager), and Dr. Christopher Cowley, (chair of the Self-Assessment Report Co-ordinating Committee).

The draft was then circulated to the School for feedback and comment. Amendments were added and the QIP was finalised and submitted to the UCD Quality Office in July 2015.

Categories

- 1. Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit
- 2. Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit
- 3. Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Timescale

- A. Recommendation already implemented
- B. Recommendations to be implemented within one year
- C. Recommendations to be implemented within five years
- D. Recommendations which will not be implemented

Report	RG Recommendation	Category (see list above)	Action Taken/Action Planned/Reason for Not Implementing GANISATION AND MANAGEMENT	Timescale (see list above)
2.14	While the Review Group believes that the present 2-year rotation of the Headship is presently working effectively for the School, consideration should nonetheless be given as to whether a longer term may be better suited to the changing nature and role of the Head of School position at UCD. The School could also consider devolving more responsibilities to the Deputy Head of School to reduce the impact on the research activities of the Head of School.	1	The Head of School succession was considered by the School in May/June 2015. Two members of the School have agreed to act as Head from 2015-17 and from 2017-19 respectively. At the end of the 2015-17 period the School will determine the identity of the successor in 2019, and the length of his or her tenure. The Head for the 2015-17 period, beginning in September 2015, will be delegating more responsibilities to his Deputy, who is herself a previous Head of School and will take over as Head of School for the 2017-19 period.	С
2.15	The workload model has been in place for approximately two years now and the RG recommend that it now be reviewed and revised. Issues to consider include (i) the possibility of using defined units (ii) more accurate capture of	1	In the first semester of 2015-16, the School Committee will meet to review and revise the workload model. Issues to be considered include the suggested possibility of using defined units (i.e. hours per week) and accurate inclusion of all outreach and administrative activities. The Head of School will use this model in allocating responsibilities from 2015-16 onwards.	В

2.16	administration and outreach activities (iii) integration of the model into the School's management practices as a tool for reflecting on the allocation of total available staff hours.	2		D.C.
2.16	The College should have a forum for administrative staff from the different Schools to share best practice and assist each other with problem-solving.	2	The School supports this recommendation and has referred the recommendation to the College for consideration in Semester 1 2015-2016. The School will report on any action arising from this recommendation in their Progress Report in 2016.	В,С
STAFF A	The Head of School needs the support of the College Finance Manager to clearly understand the changing financial model underpinning the School budget and to clarify the degree of flexibility and autonomy available to the School in using the budget most effectively.	1,2	The School has communicated this recommendation to the College Finance Manager who has indicated that he will continue to support the School as they engage with new developments to the financial model. The School welcomes the support and expertise and anticipates further help in making the budget planning tool more useable by having accurate baseline staffing costs included. The 2014-15 year has been a year of adjustment on all sides, and the incoming Head of School is looking forward to clarity concerning budgetary policy from now on.	В
3.12	Although the staff cohort is currently the largest of any philosophy cohort in Ireland, modest growth would create capacity to undertake new initiatives and exploit opportunities. The expected slate of senior retirements presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the School; the aim should be to replace senior retirees with junior appointments, with the aim of achieving a modest (plus 1 FTE) growth in the overall cohort of academic staff.	1	Between the summer of 2015 and the summer of 2019, four senior members of staff are due to retire. The School has already replaced two of these posts with junior appointments, starting in September 2015 and January 2016. The third will be recruited in Spring 2016 to start in September 2016, and the fourth in 2019. All will be at College Lecturer level. The healthy state of the School budget will allow the creation of an entirely new permanent post at College Lecturer level. This new appointment has the provisional approval of the College Principal and subject to the School's financial situation remaining healthy, will commence in September 2017, or latest, in September 2018.	A,B,C
3.13	Careful consideration should be given to the distribution of areas in undertaking staff replacements to ensure continuation of the pluralistic character of the School.	1	The two most recent appointments were broadly in the 'Analytic' and 'Continental' tradition respectively, thus maintaining the School's balance. For the 2016 and 2017/18 appointments the School will discuss the job descriptions in order to fill gaps and maintain the pluralistic character.	A,B,C

3.14	Consideration should be given to a modest expansion of the administrative staff cohort (for example, through the addition of a 0.5 FTE administrator) to help meet the challenges of devolved administrative functions and to provide support for new initiatives.	1	A review of the administrative needs of the School will be initiated in semester 1 of 2015-16. The committee will consist of the Head of School, the Deputy Head, the School Manager and the undergraduate administrator. The committee will liaise with the wider School. New initiatives being considered by the School, following discussions with the Review Group, include for example, implementing a scheme of internships (internally and externally) at level 3. The current School administrative workload, along with new functions devolved from College and the University, and new initiatives will all be taken into account when considering an additional 0.5 administrative post.	В
3.15	There is a great need for the University to find a system to allow personal promotions and job re-grading for administrative staff in UCD.	2	The School is concerned that the effective freeze on promotion and job re-grading of administrative staff is bound to lead to staff leaving or losing morale. The importance of School administrative staff to all aspects of the School should not be underestimated. UCD's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 includes a performance development programme, following a full review of promotion procedures, training processes and leave provisions. To that end, the University Management Team (UMT) has approved the establishment of three Working Groups: • Faculty Development, Reward and Recognition Working Group; • Technical Staff Development, Reward and Recognition Working Group; • Staff (administrative, library, IT and Estates) Development, Reward and Recognition Working Group. The three groups have been tasked with making recommendations to UMT with regard to faculty, technical officer and staff "development, reward and recognition". Terms of reference, committee membership and indicative timelines for each Working Group have been made available to all University staff. The School will monitor, in particular, progress in respect of reward and recognition for administrative staff and will include an update in the School's Progress Report in 2016.	B,C

3.16	The Philosophy Seminar Room should be given a high priority in the University's refenestration project and should be refurnished with flexible-use furnishings.	1, 2	Since the visit of the Review Group the School has had meetings with UCD Buildings and Services to consider options to deal with the issues concerning the seminar room (D522) which, due to unstable extremes of temperature, is not currently fit for purpose. Refenestration of the room would require elaborate scaffolding, and so will have to wait for the entire side of the building to be refenestrated. However, some minor work will be done from the inside within a year. UCD Buildings are currently developing detailed and costed options for the School to consider.	A,B,C
3.17	A storage space for confidential materials (e.g., exam scripts) should be made available to the School, which should then be removed from the Seminar Room.	1	This will be created along with other refurbishments of the entire floor. As from the start of the academic year 2015-16, confidential material will not be stored in the seminar room except during the two-day visits of the External Examiner, when s/he reviews exam/essay scripts.	В
3.18	The School should have access to a 50-seat, shared, bookable seminar room with flexible furnishings for hosting events that are too large to be accommodated within the current seminar room	2	This recommendation has been referred to the College Principal for consideration. The Head of School will discuss room allocation with the Principal in September 2015. Progress will be reported in the School's Progress Report in 2016.	В
3.19	The common space on the 5 th Floor should be refurnished to make better use of this important shared space.	1,2	Since the Review Group visit the School has discussed with UCD Buildings and Services the common space on the 5 th floor. UCD Buildings are currently developing detailed and costed options for the School to consider.	A,B
3.20	Options should be explored with the College for the provision of a post-graduate space that can be used for informal reading groups and other collaborative research activities.	2	This recommendation has been referred to the College Principal for consideration. The Head of School will discuss room allocation with the Principal in September 2015. Progress will be reported in the School's Progress Report in 2016.	В
TEACHIN	NG, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT			
4.10	With respect to the tutoring system, the Review Group recommends going ahead with the proposed increase from 7 to 10 tutorials per module (starting in week 3). However, it should be accompanied by a mandatory, systematic, discipline-specific training and mentoring	1	 In the 2015-16, tutorial provision will increase from 7 to 8 sessions per module. The policy will be reappraised at the end of the year with a view to continuing the increase of tutorial provision. The School Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator will assume overall responsibility for the new tutor training session, and will organise the session for the first or second 	A,B
	programme for tutors within the School. Such		the new tutor training session, and will organise the session for the first of second	

	training should include: facilitating		week of semester 1, 2015-16.	
	philosophical debate and discussion; responding flexibly to different group sizes; lesson planning; marking calibration; inclusiveness in classroom discussion. An academic staff member with overall responsibility for tutor training should be assigned. In general, tutors should normally attend the lectures to which the tutorials are linked.		From September 2015, tutors will be instructed to attend at least one third of the lectures of a module which they are tutoring for the first time. Tutors will not be required to attend more since this would be too time-consuming for the tutors and have cost implications for the School. The policy will be reviewed at the end of the 2015-16 year.	
4.11	The Review Group recommends that the School take a more systematic approach in confronting the issue of low attendance at lectures and tutorials. PG tutors have mentioned that the 10% contribution to the mark based on Attendance and Participation works better than leaving attendance vague. Other options may include weekly assignments (to be agreed with the relevant lecturer) to actively engage students (e.g., reflections on the reading, weekly questions, online quizzes,) as well as sharing good practice among colleagues. The Review Group also recommends initial data-collection to understand the situation better.	1	From September 2015, the School Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator will be conducting a widespread data-collection exercise to ascertain the precise extent of the problem, and identify any patterns. By the end of the first semester, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) will discuss the data with a view to making specific recommendations for piloting in 2016-17.	B,C
4.12	The Review Group recommends increasing awareness of the discipline of Philosophy to Stage 1 students and the more general arts student population. At suitable moments in the year (e.g., orientation week, week 1 or week 6), something like the 'Philosophers Café' could be a very useful tool.	1	The School has introduced a new administrative academic role – first-year co-ordinator, whose task is to monitor student engagement in the first year – especially first semester – and establish events that bring philosophy students together in order to establish a sense of identity and connection with the School, and also to enable the School to monitor its own students more effectively.	В
4.13	The School should consider appointing an academic adviser contact for each year group.	1	The School now has a 1 st -year advisor contact. The TLAC will consider the appointment of 2 nd and 3 rd -year advisors at one of its first meetings in 2015-16.	A,B

4.14	The School should engage with the College, the BA Programme Office and UCD University	1	The School will consider the subsidised manufacture of T-shirts and pens for sale to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The fifth-floor space will be refurbished,	A,B,C
	Relations to identify ways to allow students to		partly with a view to making it more attractive to students. The School is an active	
	identify with the School (see examples in 4.2).		participant in the process of restructuring the BA programme and developing ways to	
			encourage students to identify with their disciplines. This will be on the agenda of	
			School meeting in 2015-16.	
4.15	The School Teaching & Learning Committee	1	From September 2015, the School Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator will engage with	В
	could engage with UCD Teaching and Learning		UCD Teaching & Learning on this issue, and will brief colleagues and tutors accordingly.	
	to explore ways to increase the inclusion of		The issue will be on the School TLAC agenda from the start of the academic year.	
	positive and forward-looking comments in the		Progress will be reviewed after 12 months.	
	detailed formative feedback provided to			
	students (see also 4.6).			
5.8	The Review Group strongly recommends the	2	The School has referred this recommendation to the College, the Deans and the relevant	С
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	introduction of a four-year-degree programme		Programme Boards for consideration.	
	for the BA Arts as a whole.			
	for the BA Arts as a whole.		The BA programme is currently being restructured and the School will outline progress	
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5.9	In addition to its regular review of the curriculum content, the School should also review the	1	on this recommendation in its Progress Report in 2016. The change to a four-year programme would enable the entrance requirements for Philosophy students to be raised, eliminating some of the problems of poor engagement which are more significant for students arriving with lower leaving certificate points. The change would also enable us to introduce much more structure to the programme as well as to develop modules that have more direct bearing on students' future careers in year 4. (These advantages are seen to far outweigh the potential disadvantage of students being discouraged from applying for a course that requires an extra year of funding.) The School normally begins discussion of the subsequent year's curriculum in the TLAC in January, with a view to having everything in place by the end-of-April deadline for the	В
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5.10	While the Review Group supports the School's plan to introduce a new pathway to the BSocSci, the Review Group recommends that the School engage in an exercise (for example, a facilitated SWOT analysis) to assess the advantages and disadvantages of introducing other new degree programmes.	1	The School has already discussed the new 'philosophy and society' pathway, and sees only advantages in implementing it, especially given the assumption that it will not require any new modules. It is largely a branding exercise, and will encourage greater coherence to student module choices. As for new degree programmes, the School accepts the need to engage in proper analysis in advance of any decisions, though currently all new initiatives are in abeyance in order not to complicate the ongoing restructuring of the BA Arts. The School will follow-up on this initiative when the programme restructuring is completed.	С
5.11	The Review Group agrees with the proposal to introduce a new pathway within the BSocSci under the title 'Philosophy and Society'. However, the introduction of the proposed new degree programmes in 'Philosophy, Politics and Economics' (PPE) and 'Philosophy, Politics, Law' (PPL) need to be carefully considered with respect to the advantages and disadvantages (e.g., hidden extra work generated).	1	Same as 5.10.	С
RESEAR	RCH ACTIVITY			
6.13	The Review Group recommends that sabbatical arrangements and the definition of "Research-Active" be reviewed both at School and University-level, to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and do not unfairly disadvantage some members of staff.	1	The School supports a review of the University's definition of 'research-active'. Early career academics publishing important papers and being invited to give talks at conferences are deemed research-inactive by the current University definition because they have not yet had a chance to attract PhD students or gain research funding. The School usually uses the workload model instead, which incorporates more accurate representation of activity in research.	A,B
			The University does not fund sabbaticals. Instead, the School offers single semesters at normal salary without teaching or administrative duties. In addition, the School offers year-long sabbaticals, that must be spent outside Ireland, such that the staff member leaves behind a portion of their salary (currently €40,000) to fund a full-time teaching	

6.14	The Review Group recommends that the School's	1	replacement. The year-long sabbaticals discriminate against lower-salaried staff and staff with important commitments to Ireland (e.g. children in school). In an April 2015 meeting, the School already decided to make the one-semester leave more flexible and frequent for those unable to avail of the year-long sabbaticals. The School will also discuss the option of reducing the amount left behind by those with lower salaries. See response to 2.15	В
	workload model be reviewed and updated.			
6.15	The School should engage with the College to explore options for an increase in the number of stipends and/or tuition waivers for postgraduate students, with the primary aim of enabling the School to compete effectively in recruiting top applicants to the PhD programme. The School should be supported in exploring budgetary options for realising this goal.	1, 2, 3	The School has introduced new PhD scholarships for 2015, alongside the new MA scholarships developed in collaboration with the International Office, and the impact of these initiatives will be monitored carefully. The School Graduate Research Student Coordinator and the School External Relations Co-ordinator will jointly liaise with College and University efforts to plan and co-ordinate new PhD scholarship and bursary offerings. Within that framework, the School will discuss further expansion of PhD tuition waivers (full or partial) and stipends with a view to advertising them in January 2016 for students entering in September 2016. This will remain a matter of monitoring and discussion in subsequent years, and will depend on the financial developments within the School.	А,В, С
6.16	The proposed founding of a new Centre for Ethics, Government and Public Affairs presents important opportunities for expanding its engagement with public life in the Republic of Ireland and beyond. The School should develop a strategy for engaging with the new Centre and exploiting these opportunities.	1,2	The School has already been involved in discussions about the Centre so far, and will continue to remain involved. Five members of staff have research interests that are naturally close, and the School will continue to engage with the Centre plans as it develops.	В
7.10	The Review Group recommends that the School give considerable thought to introducing discipline specific training for its tutors to ensure consistency of teaching standards in tutorial sessions (see also 4.10 above).	1	From September 2015, the School Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator will organise and deliver a compulsory session of specialised pedagogical training for all new tutors. This will be held in week 1, and the first tutorials will be in week 3. The Co-ordinator will also monitor the work of new tutors through their first semester.	В

7.11	Given the nature of the discipline of Philosophy the Review Group consider it important for tutors to be required to attend the lectures for which they will be teaching the relevant tutorials.	1	From September 2015, we will be asking all tutors to attend at least 8 out of 24 lectures of any module that they have not tutored before.	В
7.12	It is recommended that there be regular meetings between the lecturer and the tutor to ensure that the design and delivery of the tutorials is at the highest standard possible. It was suggested by current students that questions be designed for each tutorial which would direct student reading and preparation for tutorials and would also guide the tutorial sessions.	1	From September 2015, the School Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator will be issuing new recommendations to all module co-ordinators (MCs) with regard to tutorial organisation. These recommendations will include regular meetings between the MC and the tutors before and during the module, as well as during assessment (particularly for the large first-year modules) and the inclusion of questions to structure each tutorial.	В
7.13	While modules are evaluated using UCD's on-line module enhancement process, it is not evident whether formal student feedback is obtained regarding the quality and value of tutorials. Given the range of student experience in tutorials the Review Group recommends that the School implement a formal process to collecting student feedback in tutorial sessions so that any problems identified can be addressed in a prompt and timely manner.	1	The School Head of Teaching and Learning will ensure that all module co-ordinators in 2015-16 and onwards include questions in the online feedback forms about the tutorials. The process will continue each semester with feedback on tutorials being passed by module co-ordinators to the tutor co-ordinator, who for the time being is also the TLAC Head. The tutor co-ordinator communicates this feedback to the tutors at the start of the following semester. In consultation with the School Manager and the Head of School this may also result in different decisions being made about who is to do the tutoring. The TLAC will consider in semester 2 of 2015-16 whether there is any need to change tutorial policies as a result of the first tranche of this feedback.	В
7.14	All staff in the School (and graduate students) should get together to brainstorm ideas to promote the School and the discipline of Philosophy both inside and outside of UCD. For example, the "Philosophers Café" could be further adopted as a recruitment tool on a continuous process rather than a once-a-year event as it appears to have been a great success and should be repeated with numerous groups of students.	1	In 2015-16 the role of Communications Officer within the School will be made more significant. This person will consult colleagues as well as University Relations office in order to plan the School's communication strategy. There will be an agenda item on School Committee meetings to consider this strategy. And early in the year, the School will consider the best format for the brainstorming session recommended by the Review Group. (See 8.18 and 9.8)	В

7.15	It is recommended that the School consider hosting more frequent Staff-Student Liaison meetings, preferably twice each semester so that teaching and learning issues can be identified and acted upon on a timely basis. The current practice of once or twice a year could be improved upon.	1	From September 2015, the School Undergraduate Co-ordinator will convene the Staff-Student Liaison meetings twice per semester.	В
SUPPO	RT SERVICES			
8.10	During the site visit concerns were expressed surrounding promotion for administrative staff within the School and within the University. This needs to be addressed at the University level (as in 3.15 above).	2	Please see 3.15 above.	B,C
8.11	Improved and sufficient HR support is needed to provide guidance through the very extensive HR documentation and to assist in managing personnel challenges as they may arise.	2	The School supports this recommendation, and will communicate its needs to HR on an on-going basis.	B,C
8.12	The School should engage more with the College Finance function to gain a greater understanding of the changing budgetary environment (as in 2.17 above).	1	The School agrees that it is one of the central priorities of the Head of School to develop quickly a complete understanding of the changing budgetary environment. See also 2.17 above.	В
8.13	The School website and pamphlets need to be Plain English tested so that the discipline of Philosophy may be understood by the ordinary person.	1	The School Communications Officer will co-ordinate the revamping of the School website, with a view to launching the new version in December 2015, in time for the new round of applications at all three levels (BA, MA, PhD). Promotional and other material will also be reviewed.	А, В
8.14	A link between the UCD International website and the School of Philosophy website in attracting international students is important.	1,2	The UCD International website currently includes links to a brief profile for the School via the University graduate studies page and a link to a more detailed overview of the School's undergraduate offerings via the University's admissions page. Both links are embedded in course information for Human Sciences and Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences sub-categories, respectively. This is similar to the links to all UCD course information on the UCD website.	В

			During the Autumn the School Communications Officer will liaise with UCD International	
			and UCD Communications to consider ways to enhance the School's profile.	
8.15	For the purposes of identification of Philosophy students, greater support for staff members in using the existing University IT services and data within Registry could be highly effective.	1,2	Since the Review Group visit the School has started working with the Programme Office to establish ways to identify its students in various categories. We have already made a lot of progress here. The progress of our students can now be monitored more closely, and these students can be engaged with more effectively.	A,B
8.16	Continue to develop the supports for student retention and engagement. In this respect it would be important to ensure that the vacant position of Engagement Officer in the College is filled	1,2	We support the appointment of a College Engagement Officer. On the agenda of TLAC and School Committee meetings in 2015-16 will be consideration of strategies to be deployed for (i) persuading more first-year students to take philosophy modules in their second year, and (ii) persuading more third-year students to take a philosophy MA. Progress will be reviewed after 12 months. A Student Progression Manager for BA has been appointed.	В
8.17	The School should strengthen its link with the UCD Career Development Centre to identify employment opportunities for Philosophy graduates.	1	The School has a Career Development Centre liaison officer, who has been assigned this task, beginning in September 2015. This will be pursued in parallel with developing career development opportunities through internal and external internships. Ideas from initial liaison with the Career Development Centre will be brought to a School committee meeting in semester 1 of 2015-16 and progress will be reviewed after 12 months.	В
8.18	The Review Group recommends that the School work with University Relations in order to build the School's profile.	1	The new School Communications Officer will work with University Relations to devise a new marketing strategy for the School. Progress will be reviewed after 12 months. (See 7.14 and 9.8)	В
EXTERN	IAL RELATIONS			
9.7	While the School currently engages in an impressive range of external activities, the Review Group recommends that they review and further develop these activities. It would be beneficial, as part of the review, to gather input from external stakeholders.	1	A small committee in the School will be set up in September 2015 to write a report outlining current external activities. This will be sent to the Stakeholders identified in the Quality Review process for their input. A further report will then be prepared for consideration by the School as a whole in semester 2 of 2015-16.	В
9.8	The School should develop a School profile (see also 8.18) and a communications plan, with	1	The School Communications Officer will be revamping the website over the summer of 2015. From September 2015, he will consult University relations while compiling the	А, В

advice from University Relations. This could feed	School's communication plan. New marketing material will be developed during the	
into future development of the School's website,	autumn of 2015.	
marketing material and other external activities.		
	(See 7.14 and 8.18)	

3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section contains a list, prioritised by the Quality Improvement Committee, of recommendations outlined in the Review Group Report, which require additional resources. The planned action to address each recommendation with an estimate of the cost involved is listed below:

1. Making seminar room D522 fit-for-purpose – see recommendation 3.16 above.

Temporary measures to enable airflow in the room and to reduce overheating when the sun is shining on the windows as well as insulation to avoid the room becoming too cold in the winter. UCD Buildings are currently developing detailed and costed options for the School to consider but we estimate about €8,000 - €10,000. Insulation behind the radiators has now been done for all offices and the seminar room. Windows are in progress of being repaired and new openable windows in the Seminar Room fitted.

2. Refurbishment of the communal space in D5 – see recommendation 3.19 above.

Skylights need to be incorporated into the ceiling, the fixed furniture needs to be replaced. We are also considering structural changes to the area to create one or two new rooms. UCD Buildings are currently developing detailed and costed options for the School to consider and will depend on the magnitude of the changes, but we estimate in the region of €60,000 for everything.

3. Promotional materials. Approx. €1,000 – see recommendation 4.14 above.

This relatively small sum will be spent on new promotional materials, designed for Open Days, conferences, and to recruit students to the Philosophy Society. We have in mind new posters and flyers, perhaps pens with a logo, and perhaps a set of subsidised T-shirts to be sold to students in order to create a stronger sense of identity.