

University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

UCD School of Geography

January 2023

1. Introduction

Upon reception of the Review Group's finalised report, the School proceeded with work on the Quality Improvement Plan.

The Quality Improvement Committee discussed recommendations among itself and in School meetings during trimester 1 2022/23. Its composition is as follows:

- -Associate Professor Julien Mercille (Chair, Head of School)
- -Professor Alun Jones (Graduate)
- -Associate Professor Ainhoa Gonzalez
- -Assistant Professor Tobi Morakinyo
- -Assistant Professor Arlene Crampsie (Teaching & Learning)
- -Assistant Professor Jonathan Turner (Research)
- -Assistant Professor Christine Bonnin (Community Engagement)
- -Assistant Professor Jeremy Auerbach
- -Ms Kate Bruton (School Executive Assistant)

The relevant timeline is as follows:

- -Review Group visit to the School: 11-14 April 2022
- -Review Group final report received by the School: 28 July 2022

2. Recommendations for Improvements - Follow-Up Action Taken and/or Planned

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 additional recurrent or capital funding

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead* (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
3.15	The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example, the Curriculum Management System.	1	Completed already. New hires (Sept. 2022) received induction on IT and Brightspace including Curriculum Management System, Going forward, a process has been put in place to ensure the same for all subsequent new hires.	KB, HoS	Sept 2022	ongoing
4.12	The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address over-assessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload.	1	Completed already for 2022. Faculty met in May 2022 for a detailed discussion of options for reducing over-assessment and deadline bunching within the School. This exercise will be repeated in the next years as appropriate. This is initiated and carried out by the School's Teaching & Learning Committee which leads a School discussion and module-by-module review of assessment, with reductions in assessment agreed and implemented.	AC & T&L Committee	Sept 2022	ongoing
4.13	Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in	1	The School Teaching & Learning Committee will outline a statement on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with	AC & T&L Committee	Nov 2022	Nov 2023

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	line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on hardcopy versus electronic comments on e-copy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences.		UCD policies to guide assessment feedback in the School, e.g., with respect to the use of rubrics, minimum level of feedback, structure of feedback, etc. School staff will thus be able to follow this structure in their feedback on assessment.			
5.11	Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders.	1	A needs analysis will be undertaken by the Director of MSc Geospatial to determine the demand for Continuing Professional Development programmes in Geographical Information System (GIS) and remote sensing amongst teachers, employers and other stakeholders.	Dir. MSc Geospatial	Jan 2023	July 2023

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead* (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
6.11	There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the post-award area when large grants have been secured. The SAR refers to enhancing in-house support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively.	1	The School will use research overheads to appoint a part-time School research manager. It is expected that the new hire will start January 2023.	HoS, Dir. Research	Jan 2023	Jan 2025
2.ORGAN	ISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RESO	URCES				
RG (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
2.18	The School should consider undertaking further review of module provision at postgraduate level and look at possibilities for consolidation of pathways, particularly where there are very low numbers of students on modules.	1	In light of staff changes (arrivals and departures) this will be reviewed this academic year. Target date is March 2023 for the Programme Board.	AJ	Jan 2023	Sept 2023
2.19	To address low student uptake, the RG recommends also considering the name of the	1	The School will take clear steps to survey employers and students for feedback to	AJ/TM	Oct 2022	March 2023

RG (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
	Geospatial Data Analysis be changed to MSc in 'Geographic Information Systems' or incorporate the term 'Geodata'?). Using a globally recognised name may enable the programmes to be found by more prospective students (e.g. in a Google search).					
2.20	The RG recommend the development of a School succession plan for academics in respect of leadership roles.	1	The School is implementing a system of shadowing for key roles to ensure better planning and transition.	HoS	Sept 2022	N/A
3. STAFF	AND FACILITIES					
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff / Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
3.12	As the School has highlighted the heavy administrative burden with committees, research funding etc., consideration needs to be given as to whether five staff members are necessary on the taught Graduate Committee, and perhaps reduce this in line with how other Schools in the College are represented on this committee.	1	The School's Graduate Committee consists of Heads of all the School's Master's programmes (one of whom is the Committee Head). Having all programmes' representatives ensures high efficiency in its activities, particularly in decision-making and responding to issues as they arise. Most decisions are reached via email correspondence and the administrative burden is consequently light, and in fact, no committee member has ever voiced issues	AJ	N/A	N/A

3. STAFF	AND FACILITIES					
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff / Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
			To address administrative burden issues, the School has hired a part-time Research Manager, which will take over some of the tasks previously carried out by School administrators and Committee Heads (especially Research Committee).			
3.13	The RG recommend a review of the workload model operating in the School.	1	The administrative tasks will be circulated to staff more regularly and workload issues related to over-assessment in teaching will be addressed via actions outlined above (please see prioritised recommendation 4.12 above)	HoS, Dir T&L	Sept 2022	N/A
3.14	Feedback from PhD students highlighted that their designated study space is valued and the RG recommend this space be maintained.	1	The PhD rooms are left as is and there are no plans to change them, although UCD plans for space reallocation might change that down the line.	HoS	Sept 2022	N/A
3.15	The RG recommend that new School faculty and staff receive a more formal School induction process that will include how to use IT, BrightSpace and other IT systems that are required, for example, the Curriculum Management System.	1	Addressed under the prioritised recommendation 3.15 above.	HoS	Sept 2022	Ongoing
3.16	Linked to 3.15 above, the RG recommends consideration also of a more formal mentorship programme (newly appointed and	1	Implemented: The Head of School or a designated member of staff will act as mentor for newly hired junior hires.	All	Sept 2022	Ongoing

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	more junior faculty linked with more senion faculty) to assist those more junior staff to maintain and enhance their research, while also getting their teaching and administrative duties up and running.	e e				
3.17	The RG recommends consideration be given to incorporating marketing activities into the role of a designated administrative person to hell promote the Masters' programmes, especially through consideration of naming /branding and statement of unique selling points. (see also 2.19 above).	e p ly	Already completed. The School administrators are already providing extensive marketing support and the Senior Executive Assistant has taken over the "marketing" roles previously dealt with by the Community & Engagement Committee.	SEA	Sept 2022	Ongoing
	ING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT					
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff / Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
4.12	The RG recommends that the School undertake a review to address overassessments at undergraduate level and the impact on student and staff workload.		Addressed under prioritised recommendation 4.12 above.	AC & T&L Committee	Sept 2022	Ongoing
4.13	Consideration needs to be given to developing School of Geography statements on assessment feedback policies and practices in line with university policies (e.g. regarding hand-written comments on		Addressed under prioritised recommendation 4.13 above.	AC & T&L Committee	Nov 2022	May 2023 fo next AY

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff / Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
4.14	hardcopy versus electronic comments on ecopy in BrightSpace, the standardised use of transparent marking rubrics (grids) versus free-form comments tailored for different types of assessment, policies on minimum level and structure of feedback etc). Greater consistency in the nature of feedback across the diverse modes of assessment is required, while still allowing some room for individual staff styles and preferences. The RG recommends consideration be given to producing pedagogy-related publications, either for specialist geographical pedagogical journals and/or for publications or targeted at secondary school students taking geography or related subjects. This provides opportunities for sharing of best practice, enhancing promotion applications, and	1	The Teaching & Learning committee will discuss this at the next meeting and add it for discussion at the next Teaching & Learning Away Day provisionally scheduled for early December 2022.	AC & T&L Committee	Nov 2022	Ongoing
4.15	improved marketing. Within the parameters set by the University, and in liaison with the College, greater consideration could be given to combining the best elements of online provision with face-to-face provision, for pedagogical reasons, for equality, diversity and inclusivity (e.g. widening access) reasons, and also for	1,2	This is not possible this year given the University requirement to focus on encouraging students to return to campus, however in association with University and College level discussions the School is feeding into broader conversations around online assessment and Technology Enhanced	AC & T&L Committee	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	marketing reasons. The RG recommends that		Learning (TEL). This will leave us in a better			
	the School develop a School Teaching and		position to consider these issues for the future.			
	Learning strategy that is aligned with the					
	University. For example, there could be more					
	pre-recorded lectures where the basic topic					
	content is delivered, and then face-to-face					
	activities that are based around discussions					
	of that content and/or active learning					
	exercises that apply the content.					
4.16	The School could benefit from ensuring all	1	This is already in place for masters' students –	AC, JA	Jan	Ongoing
	students undertaking research are fully		with dates provided in the handbook from the		2023	
	aware of UCD ethical approval dates and the		start of the year. This will also be implemented			
	associated requirement for timely		this year for undergraduate students once they			
	documentation submission. This will		have been accepted to the Research in Action			
	facilitate approval in a timely manner and		module. The School has a new Ethics			
	enable students to commence their research.		Committee now in place which will provide			
			clear and formal guidance to all students			
			undertaking research regarding deadlines and			
			submission so that they can commence their			
			research work early on and in due course.			

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5.9	The RG recommend further review of assessment strategies (including mapping of assessment to module learning outcomes at Masters level) similar to that undertaken at undergraduate level.	1	This will take place when module offerings are confirmed, taking account of the relevant university deadlines for Programme Board submissions.	AJ	Jan 2023	Sept 2023
5.10	The RG recommend the School canvass advice about the best way to showcase and promote its programmes, including the naming of postgraduate taught programmes in a way that will best appeal to potential students. This might involve making better use of alumni and other external networks.	1	This will be addressed by Programme Directors (see also 2.19 above). It is anticipated that consultation with external stakeholders will guide the establishment of a strategy to promote our Master's programmes, including name changes if necessary.	AJ	Oct 2022	Jan 2024
5.11	Opportunities to address the School's budget deficit exist, by growing taught postgraduate numbers and potentially providing short courses for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular knowledge/skills sets where the School wishes to promote itself and where there is vocational demand (e.g. CPD in GIS/geodata/geospatial data analysis). The RG recommend a needs analysis be undertaken to determine the demand for CPD programmes amongst teachers,	1	Addressed under prioritised recommendation 5.11 above.	TM	Jan 2023	July 2023

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	employers and other stakeholders. (see also 2.19 above).					
6.RESEAR	CH ACTIVITY					
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
6.11	There is a need for improved grant management support, especially in the postaward area when large grants have been secured. The SAR refers to enhancing inhouse support through a dedicated Research Manager but given the School's budgetary situation, a discussion also needs to be had about where and how College-level support for grant management can be utilised more effectively. Prioritised Recommendation	1	Addressed under prioritised recommendation 6.11 above. Addressed under prioritised recommendation A Research Manager (part time) has been hired for the School for 2 years.	HoS	Jan 2023	Jan 2025
6.12	The RG recommends specific targets should be set for staff availing of sabbatical leave that are appropriate to career stage,	1	Currently under School discussion, for example, one idea under consideration is to ask staff returning from sabbatical to deliver a	JM (HoS), JT (Dir Research)	Sept 2022	Ongoing

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	particularly with a view to prioritising the quality (rather than necessarily the quantity) of outputs/activities. A focus should be placed on the outputs/activities that really require dedicated time (e.g. the large, agenda-setting review paper, or the large grant application). When staff return from sabbatical leave, feedback on their sabbatical achievements needs to be shared more widely within the School, for instance, in the form of a research seminar or a freely-available report. This will help ensure transparency and enable sharing of learnings/best practice.		seminar in the seminar series or provide a brief report outlining the research work they have accomplished while away. Regarding targets for achievements while on sabbatical, this will need to be agreed between those going on sabbatical and the Research Committee, and may consist of a large grant application, completion of journal articles or other publications. Targets will be set on a case by case process managed by the Research Committee.			
6.13	The RG recommends a more strategic approach for staff wishing to compete for research-oriented academic leadership positions, especially in key subject-related organisations in Ireland or overseas (e.g. Geographical Society of Ireland, Quaternary Research Association, International Geographical Union, International Association of Geomorphologists). The external research landscape is constantly shifting, and 'horizon scanning' and	1	The Director of Research will develop a strategy targeting strategic leadership positions and establish relationships with relevant organisations so as to support staff wishing to take up those positions.	JT	Jan 2023	June 2023

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	improved guidance for newly appointed staff (especially more junior staff) from more established colleagues (e.g. through the recommended formal mentoring process – see 3.16) would be helpful for individual and collective benefit.					
6.14	Much teaching, learning and research by School staff (and UCD's Earth Institute) is aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The RG recommends that the School align themselves with UCD's Sustainability Report that outlines a structured programme designed to embed the UN SDGs across education, research, governance and engagement activities. The School are well placed to help shape this agenda and other strands of UCD's Strategic Objectives and also to leverage the engagement as a marketing/promotion tool.	1	The School is already strongly aligned with UCD's Sustainability Report through the codirected BSc Sustainability programme. In addition, the School delivers a number of modules in the BSc Geography and BSc Social Sciences programmes that cover SDGs and sustainable development, including 'Mapping a Sustainable World' and 'Environment and Sustainability'. Staff in the School are currently engaged in SDG research and have recently presented at the IAU Conference's SDG showcase 'Working Together to Implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals'. The School will liaise with the University in relation to what other ways it could be more formally and strategically involved in the promotion of SDGs.	Ainhoa González (AG)	Jan 2023	July 2023

7.MANAC	GEMENT OF QUALITY AND ENHANCE	MENT				
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
7.14	The RG recommends that more staff (especially, but not exclusively, newly appointed staff) should be encouraged to take up the UCD Professional Certificate in University Teaching and Learning.	1	This information is already circulated by the School. The School's target is that all junior new staff should complete this Certification. Other staff will also be encouraged to complete this.	HoS	Ongoing	Ongoing
7.15	The RG recommends that the recently established Staff-Student Consultative Committee clearly outlines student representatives' roles.	1	This is already in place. Students are notified when the call for nominations is sent out and this is followed up by circulation of the Terms of Reference for the Staff-Student Consultative Committee to members and by a training session in advance of the first meeting.	AC	Ongoing	Ongoing
7.16	The RG recommends that the School review and ensure a more timely applications process that would be more responsive to the future needs of students and also help with marketing activities.	1,2	Applications are dealt with as soon as they come into the School. UCD Global processes may take longer than School ones. The School will continue to monitor applications and ensure that they are dealt with swiftly.	Dir. Grad. Studies; School Executive Assistant.	Ongoing	Ongoing
7.17	Responsibility for oversight of Teaching and Learning within the School needs to consider both undergraduate and graduate programmes. This would ensure that emphasis is also placed on developing and promoting postgraduate taught programmes, as well as ensuring timely applications and be responsive to the future needs of students.	1	There are good reasons for keeping these roles distinct. We already overlap where there are issues of relevance to both e.g. the joint assessment review, the Teaching & Learning Away Day etc, discussions re: structures etc. The Director of Teaching & Learning is responsible for undergraduate teaching and the Director of Graduate Studies for Masters teaching. They coordinate as relevant. By	JM (HoS); Dir. T&L Dir. Grad. Studies	Ongoing	Ongoing

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			experience, this is more effective than one person responsible for teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. (see also			
8.SUPPC	ORT SERVICES		7.16 above)			
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completi on Date
8.7	The School should continue to seek to benefit from the College's ongoing marketing support for Masters programmes.	1	The School will continue to liaise with College. (See also response to 3.17 above)		ongoing	ongoing
8.8	In ensuring that students are fully aware of any additional costs, the RG recommend these are made more explicit. For example, provision of information on the School's website and during programme registration, and also by additional reminders at the time of module registration. The School have specific flyers for each Masters programmes and where fieldwork is required/offered as part of each programme, it would be useful to highlight the additional cost on these	1	This is already the case for undergraduate level with details recorded in the Curriculum Management System and will also be implemented for postgraduate modules from now on.	Studies; Dir.	Sept 2022	June 2023

8.SUPPORT SERVICES							
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completi on Date	
8.9	The School should seek to engage with UCD Estates to understand the availability of lecture capture facilities in teaching spaces and other related support.	1	This is done on an ongoing basis; furthermore, the School is now in discussion with Estates to fit the room E003 with hybrid technology for meetings and seminars, which could be used for teaching as well.	JM(HoS), AC (Dir T&L), STO	Nov 2022	Ongoing	

9.EXTERN	9.EXTERNAL RELATIONS						
RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category (See above list)	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date	
9.15	More alumni could be invited to meet with undergraduate students for career advice, and more opportunities to bridge the gap with industry should be established by having more external visits. Doing so will help to embed employability more strongly and explicitly into the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.	1	We are working in collaboration with the Geography Society on this. Postgraduate alumni are invited each year (since the last 2 years) to contribute to a career panel and Q&A aimed at current undergraduate geography students. The Geography Society also invites guest speakers to deliver talks on 'careers in Geography' and career advice, followed by Q&A with current students; this took place most recently in October 2022. The School are also liaising with UCD Alumni Network to explore other activities along these lines.	HoS, Geography Society, SEA	Jan 2023	Ongoing	
9.16	An industry advisory panel made up of employers, industry experts and staff from the School could be established to explore where there is a need for new programmes (e.g. Masters, CPD courses) and the deliberations could feed into the market research and business case for developing new Masters and promoting existing ones. For instance, given the links between academic experts in the School and their external networks, there is the opportunity for some unique perspectives to be offered in	1	The Masters Programmes Directors will set this panel up following an assessment of benefits and expertise needed for a School level industry advisory panel that would advise/inform masters programmes development and CPD activities.	TM, HoS	Jan 2023	July 2023	

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	the development of new programmes or CPD activities. For example, expertise in digital geographies, GIS and social justice, GIS and global health could be leveraged to offer something unique to UCD.					
9.17	The School could consider how best to further showcase and leverage their public and international engagement and embed this in their teaching.	1	The School has recently opened and launched the DEEP Lab (Digital Economy & Extreme Politics), headed by Prof. Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and her ERC Consolidator Grant. The Lab will host (and has started hosting) high-profile international academic visitors and acts as an important hub for bi-directional global engagement (hosting people and making the School known globally). Visitors to the Lab usually offer teaching or workshops to students both undergraduate and postgraduate. The School also has invested significant sums in social media ads to promote its programmes, which has already resulted in an increase in Master's students registrations.	JM (HoS)	Sept. 2022	Sept 2023

3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section should only contain 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 should also be included:

1.	N/A	
2.	N/A	

3. ____N/A____

Note: The Quality Improvement Plan should be used to inform Unit and College level academic, support service and resource planning activities.