Quality Review

of the

Library

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Mary Immaculate College – An Introduction

Mary Immaculate College is an autonomous third-level college, academically linked to the University of Limerick, offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Education and the Arts.

In 1898 Bishop O'Dwyer and the Sisters of Mercy established the College for the professional education of Catholic primary school teachers. In 1974 Mary Immaculate College became a recognised college of the National University of Ireland. The beginning of the AY 1974/75 marked the inauguration of the Bachelor of Education degree course. In 1991, a formal linkage, sponsored by the Higher Education Authority/Department of Education and Science was established between the University of Limerick (UL) and Mary Immaculate College (MIC).

While teacher education remains at the core of its activities, Mary Immaculate College has expanded significantly during the last fifteen years with the addition of the Bachelor of Arts programme, Early Childhood Care and Education Programme, and a series of programmes at post-graduate level.

Quality Assurance at Mary Immaculate College

MIC has always been committed to ensuring the very highest standards of excellence in its teaching learning and research activities. In order to be consistent with the standards applying in the University sector, MIC has developed policies and procedures as set out in section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997.

The Act requires:
− Evaluation of each department and any service provided by the institution, by both employees and persons other than employees, competent to make national/international comparison.
− Assessment by those, including students, availing of teaching, research and other services provided by the university.
− The Act also requires the publication and implementation of the findings arising from above procedures, given available resources.

The approach to quality at MIC is informed by "A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities", published by the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) in 2003.

The main aim of the quality assurance process is quality improvement. In common with other institutions, the quality review process at MIC involves the preparation of a comprehensive, critical self-assessment report by the department, a peer review involving external experts who visit the department and study the self-assessment report, a peer review report that incorporates ther

responses and quality improvement plans of the department and college, and the implementation of these plans within the resources available to the college.

Peer Review Team

As recommended by CHIU in its framework document a peer review group should include at least 2 external experts, capable of making national / international comparisons. It may also include one or two senior College staff.

For an administrative/support department, the external reviewer should have expertise in the area under review.

The members of the peer review team were as follows:

Ms. Sarenne Magennis (Chair)	Director of Quality; National University of Ireland, Maynooth;
Prof. John Lancaster	Director of Computing and Library Services; University of Huddersfield;
Dr. Teresa O'Doherty	Dean of Education; Mary Immaculate College;
Dr. Michael G. Healy	Director of Research; Mary Immaculate College;

Mary Immaculate College Library

The objectives of the library at MIC are to:
– Provide relevant and responsive library services
– Provide quality library materials
– Contribute to the development of the research skills and education of the MIC community
– Support and encourage each individual user of the library service

In January 2006, the Library became the first support department at Mary Immaculate College to initiate the quality review process. The peer review process took place from the 10th to the 12th of October 2006.

General Comments and Acknowledgements

The Quality Review Group would like to thank the President and staff of MIC for their engagement with the Review process. We should like to thank the Librarian and Library staff for the excellence of their preparations, for the clarity of the Self Assessment Report and related documentation and for the openness of the discussions. We should also like to acknowledge the thorough and effective support given to the Group by Deirdre Carroll of the MIC Quality Office. Finally we wish to record our appreciation for the warm welcome and generous hospitality of the College, which served to make our task both enjoyable and stimulating.

The external assessors found the Mission Statement of the College to be admirable and inspiring and were pleased to note that the Mission Statement of the Library service successfully complements that of the College – in which the value of the individual is given a particular focus.

In an increasingly IT intensive environment the idea of the hybrid library as a continuum has been embraced by the Library staff and the Group regards this as very encouraging. The Library staff have demonstrated a commendable willingness to engage with the new information environment and to create a culture of continuous improvement; their enthusiam augurs well for the future of the Library and the College community which it serves. In addition their exercise in reconceptualizing the library role is considered by the Review Group to be particularly noteworthy.

1. COMMENDATIONS

The Review Group is pleased to be able to report that many positive comments were received about the Library service and these are comments with which the Review Group is very ready to concur.

A number of matters are particularly worthy of commendation viz.,
- The inclusiveness of preparations prior to the Review Group visit
- The modernisation of Library services and facilities using ISO 9000/2000 principles
- The professionalizing of the service environment
- The excellence of the audio-visual resources
- The inter-library loan service
- The increased use of IT based systems and services (including the provision of a growing range of electronic information resources, access to other library catalogues and the automation of Library service functions)
- The increased emphasis on staff training and development

- The exemplary leadership shown by the Librarian and senior management team
- The commitment of all the Library staff and their willingness to embrace change

2.   KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   That a Library Annual Plan is prepared to guide its further development and that at the halfway stage of the academic year a progress report on the Plan is shared with Library staff and the Library User Group (4.1)

2.2   That the concerns of the Review Group about the inadequacy of Library space are conveyed to the HEA (4.4)

2.3   That consideration should be given to reconfiguring space in the Library Building. This would involve the relocation of the printed collections and study areas, the more effective utilisation of the foyer, making minor adjustments to a number of architectural features to reduce noise problems and improvements to staff areas (4.4)

2.4   That a Library Learning, Teaching and Research Support Service is established led by a senior librarian who would also undertake the role of Deputy Librarian. This would involve the reorganisation of Library staff and the more effective use of information technologies for the purpose of releasing staff time for this new development. A benchmarking exercise would need to be undertaken to inform a review of Library staff structures (4.10)

2.5   That the terms of reference of the Library User Group are reviewed with a view to re-energising its activities (4.2)

2.6   That formal liaison structures are put in place between the Library and the MIC Students' Union (4.5)

2.7   That consideration should be given to appointing individual Library staff as liaison officers for each College Department (4.5)

2.8   That in the area of Library automation (4.6)

    a.   consideration is given to extending wireless computing to defined areas of the Library and the establishment of a lap top lending scheme

    b.   an option appraisal exercise is undertaken in relation to Radio Frequency Identification technology to permit the introduction of a modern self service system and more effective collection management arrangements thus releasing staff to provide more personal support to Library users and at the same time getting rid of unnecessary queuing

c.   in the light of the inadequacy of the current inter library loan system, consideration is given to the acquisition of the more advanced Lancaster University system, perhaps under the auspices of the University of Limerick licence

d.   technology to establish an IT based Institutional Repository is acquired to permit MIC to engage more actively with the international research environment

e.   improvements are made to the microform reader printer facilities

f.   the photocopier service is reviewed and that consideration is given to the introduction of multi-functional device technology in which printing, photocopying and scanning facilities are provided from the same machine

2.9   That a clear view of the needs of users in relation to opening hours is obtained with a view to extending access to the Library. In this connection consideration should be given to employing students or security staff to facilitate this (4.7)

2.10   That the excessive duplication of material in the Tailteann Store should be dealt with, thus providing space for the relocation of more highly used materials in a better location (4.8)

2.11   That at least daily collections are undertaken from the Dock Road Store (4.8)

2.12   That a Managed Information Environment is developed for the purpose of ensuring the scholarly needs of all users of the Library are met in a more systematic way (4.3)

2.13   That for the acquisition of book materials a full service model is introduced (4.3)

2.14   That information skills tuition is more fully integrated into the academic programmes of the College and that such skills are made a key element of the suite of skills given to new researchers. This would require close collaboration with the Research Office and Post Graduate tutors. (4.9)

2.15   That a formalized communication system is established within the Library which takes into account the needs of all Library staff (4.5)

2.16   That an annual Training Needs Assessment is undertaken which encompasses the development needs of all staff (4.11)

3.   OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Within this document a number of more minor matters are drawn to the attention of the Library and the College. Whilst individually they may be considered less significant issues, acting upon them would improve very considerably the service environment provided by the Library (4.12)

4.   THE REVIEW

4.1   The Library Annual Plan

The Library is to be commended on the inclusivity of its quality review process and this has clearly been valued by all the Library staff. The development of a Library Annual Plan to build upon this work is strongly recommended. It is envisaged this would involve consultation with all Library staff as well as the Library User Group and representatives of other stake holders. The foundation documents for this work would be the Mission Statement of the College, the Mission Statement of the Library, the Annual Guide and the Annual Research Report. Utilizing these documents would support the strategic alignment of the Library plan with the direction of the College and the profile of its users. It is envisaged that this plan would take into account work with the MIC IT service, links with the UL Library, new developments in scholarly communication (eg Open Access, IReL), an annual space utilization exercise, appropriate performance indicators and the examination of barriers to Library usage that affect some students and staff. It is further recommended that at the half-way point of the academic year a progress report on the Annual Plan is prepared for discussion with the Library User Group and is shared with all the Library staff.

4.2   Library User Group

We recommend that consideration is given to reviewing the terms of reference of this Group for the purpose of re-energising its activities

4.3   Collection Development and Information Provision

The culture of the book is strong in MIC and demonstrates that the humane traditions of the College are in good hands. Nevertheless, there is a need to embrace more actively the new information environment by the development of a Managed Information Environment in which the acquisition of learning resources is undertaken in a much more systematic fashion.   Further information will be provided separately to the Librarian. It will need the active involvement of academic staff, the utilisation of the College VLE and the more effective use of electronic information systems. This needs to be given a high priority as there is evidence that some students and staff are not getting all the information resources they need to sustain their learning. In essence a more highly developed needs based approach by the Library is required and this would also take into account the limiting nature of the current inter-library loan restrictions.

It has been suggested that there can be long delays in the receipt of recommended reading, scholarly resources, DVDs and other audio-visual materials. The success or otherwise of information supply is a key measure of Library effectiveness. Outsourcing has been introduced but it is limited to book processing. It is strongly recommended that a full service model is introduced providing a shelf-ready book facility on the lines of the Dawson model.

4.4   Accommodation

The Review Group considers that the accommodation provided to support the Library service is inadequate and militates against the provision of an effective modern library service. This is a view which is shared by staff and students at every level of the College. Clearly immense efforts have been made to ensure that space is used as effectively as possible in order to support the student learning experience. In this regard both College and Library staff are warmly to be commended on their efforts. It is noted, however, that the HEA norms in relation to the seating to student ratio are 5:1. In MIC the ratio is greater than 10:1. This has implications in terms of health and safety, disabled access and the general user experience. The external members of the Review Group request that MIC conveys their concerns to the HEA with a view to expediting funding for a new building.

The prospect of a new Library building in the next few years is greatly to be welcomed. In the meantime a several developments are recommended for consideration:

a. that the lower foyer area of the Library Building is used for the establishment of an IT based information skills teaching area. It is envisaged that this space could also be used as an additional student IT area when not in use as a teaching space and could indeed provide extended access to IT based systems and services outside normal Library hours.

b. that a major space reconfiguration exercise is undertaken by the Library with the support of the Buildings Office and an architectural consultant for the purpose of relocating all the printed collections to the central reading room, thus permitting the establishment of more individual designated areas for researchers, teaching practice preparation, collaborative learning and general quiet study. In the process, this would permit better noise management and a less crowded study environment. More analysis is needed of user data to demonstrate space requirements for both books and readers as a basis for the more effective utilisation of existing Library accommodation.

c. as campus developments permit the re-location of functions currently housed in the Library building, conversion of the vacated spaces to Library purposes should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

d. the upper foyer of the Library building could be reconfigured to offer an new location for the Library service desk and more group learning space.

e. there are architectural features in the design of the building which seem to be aesthetic rather than functional which make noise management difficult within the core reading and study spaces of the Library. Consideration should be given to using glass to seal off the open spaces which transmit noise from one floor to the next.

f. consideration should be given to the provison of a more appropriate staff space in the Library. This is important in a context where Library staff work at times where all catering and rest facilities are closed.

We strongly recommend that consideration is given to these issues as a matter of urgency as the number of users has increased so significantly.

4.5   Communication

Communication with student representatives is deeply important and it is proposed that formal liaison structures are put in place between the Library and the MIC Students' Union.

Effective liaison between the Library and academic departments is an important element in the delivery of good quality services. Consideration should be given to appointing individual library staff as liaison officers for each department. There are enough assistant librarians and senior library assistants to allow this to happen. The designation of individual staff members in academic departments to take on the library liaison remit would further aid communication and promote service development.

Effective communication mechanisms are also essential to the work of the Library and it is evident that attempts are being made to develop such. The Library staff are fragmented because of the varied nature of the Library service – provided over long hours and involving full-time, part-time, and job-share employment arrangements. Clearly this means that there are challenges in involving all staff members in consultation, decision-making and planning processes. It is recommended that further consideration is given to communication within the Library so that a formalized process is established which takes into account the needs and interests of all staff.

4.6   Library Automation

The Library is to be commended on the range of its IT based systems and services. The Review Group wishes to comment further on these developments *viz.,*

Wireless Computing

It is noted that plans are being prepared by the IT Service to extend access to wireless technology. It is proposed that this facility is introduced to defined areas

in the Library to facilitate more effective access to general IT facilities and to IT based information resources. A laptop lending scheme could also be considered as a part of this development .

Radio Frequency Identification Systems (RFID) and Self Service

The introduction of RFID would permit both the provision of a self-service facility and the more effective management of the printed collections. In the process staff resources could be released to allow for the establishment of more personalized support for library users. As there are a number of new players in the library self-service market it is recommended that an option appraisal is undertaken in relation to these technnologies to ensure that MIC Library users have access to optimal systems in the ongoing development of an electronic information environment.

Inter Library Loans (ILL)

The current TALIS Inter Library Loan system has limited functionality. It is recommended that consideration is given to the acquisition of the Lancaster University system which is a more advanced facility. This in turn would provide an more effective service to College students and staff . It is suggested that the possibility of acquiring this system under the auspices of the University of Limerick licence is explored.

Institutional Repository

The introduction of such a repository should be considered. This would give meaningful support for the research efforts of MIC and place the research output of the College within an international forum. A useful exemplar is the *e-prints* development at NUI Maynooth.

Microform Reader Printers

It is noted that the existing equipment is out of date, does not permit the enlargement of images and can be subject to failure. One machine is leased and it is proposed that this lease is renegotiated for the purpose of replacing the equipment. It is further recommended that consideration is given to the replacement of the other machines in a phased way.

Photocopiers and Printers

Library users are of the view that photocopier and printer provision does not entirely meet their needs. It is recommended that this service is reviewed in an evidence based way with a view to making available more appropriate facilities. The Review Group recognizes that space is at a premium and recommends that consideration is given to the introduction of MFD (Multi-Functional Device) technology, in which printing, photocopying and scanning facilities are provided from the same machine.

4.7 Opening Hours

Whilst opening hours have improved recently, and congratulations are due for this development, they do remain inadequate at exam preparation times, teaching practice preparation times and for certain post-graduate and research students and for individuals who need acess to services at weekends. In addition, a 9.30am start to the Library day is not appropriate for a modern third level education facility. An 8.00am opening time should be considered. It is recommended that a clear vew of the needs of users is obtained and that enhanced hours of opening are provided. Consideration should be given to employing students or security staff for this purpose. The provision of self service facilities would mean that a reasonable level of service could be provided.

4.8 Stores

The efforts made by the College in providing additional storage space for the rapidly expanding book collection are to be applauded, as is the willingness of the Buildings Office to assist in the collection of book materials from the Dock Road Store. Nevertheless, the present arrangements do not meet the needs of users. (By way of comparison Trinity College Dublin has a three hour collection sevice for its extensive store materials): A number of actions could improve the situation viz.,

a. The weeding of the Tailteann Store thus providing space for more highly used material in a convenient location. In this connection it is estimated that 50% of the store is taken up with material that is of no schorlarly value to MIC. Clearly this is a large task but students could do much of the weeding if clear working parameters are established.

b. At least daily collections from the Dock Road store are established.

It is noted that the College is in negotiation with the Franciscan Order with a view to taking ownership of the church and associated building that are being vacated by the Order. This space could be used to develop a library centre of excellence for theology and philosophy, providing housing for the working collection and for a number of significant theological collections recently acquired by the College. In turn this would permit the rationalization of printed collections on the College campus.

4.9 Information Skills

The Library undertakes a range of information skills training activities and it is recommended that these be more fully integrated into the academic programmes of the College. Information skills are skills for life and such a development would accord with the enlightened mission of MIC with its emphasis on developing the whole person. Currently staff resources are limited but these could be extended by the introduction of more automation and the outsourcing of certain routines.

The research effort of MIC is wide ranging and impressive and the Library could do more to support this strengthening culture (not least in the area of information skills provision) if there were greater levels of collaboration with the Research Office and post-graduate tutors. Such a development is positively recommended. The less than optimal environment currently available for the delivery of information skills tuition is addressed in the section headed Accommodation.

Currently, information skills teaching is restricted by the limited availability of computer labs. For this to be effective an interactive facility is needed and the provision of a new computing area in the foyer of the Library building would permit significant improvements to be made to the information handling skills of the student community.

4.10   Staffing Matters

At present there are four grades in the Library: Librarian, Assistant Librarian, Senior Library Assistant and Library Assistant. As there is a substantial number of long-serving members of staff the opportunities for progression are limited. It is noted that the public library service has introduced an additional intermediate grade and it is recommended that a benchmarking exercise be undertaken taking into account practice in the public library, the Institutes of Technology and St Patricks College Drumcondra, with a view to informing a review of Library staff structures in MIC.

As a new e-learning culture emerges more specialist support is needed by users. It is proposed that the Library management carry out an audit of personnel requirements in line with their vision of Library provision in the short to medium term. In particular it is proposed that a Library Learning, Teaching and Research Support Service is established for the purpose of providing tailored information support and training in the new 21st century information environment. The individual who champions this initiative could also take on the role of Deputy to the Librarian and work to align the Library service more closely with the mission of the College in terms of that environment. The issue of staff training and development and the release of staff resources for this initiative is considered elsewhere in this this report.

4.11   Staff Training and Development

The Library's senior staff are to congratulated on the new emphasis placed on staff training and development in relation both to the up-skilling of staff working in the new information environment and in customer care. It is recommended that the Library undertakes an annual Training Needs Assessment, which encompasses the needs of all Library staff. It is envisaged that this would involve meeting each member of staff and would provide an opportunity to discuss professional, personal and career development, job rotation and the particular training needs of part-time and job-share staff, also taking into account the College's training and development policies and opportunities.

4.12 Other Issues Noted

In the course of our visit we noted a number of other matters where opportunities for improvement may be available. We have listed these below:

- Loan entitlements. There is dissatisfaction with the limited lending facilities available to some categories of students and the restrictions placed on the use of books by students for whose programme of study those books are not primarily intended. It is not in the interests of the intellectual development of students to place unnecessary restrictions on their access to knowledge.

- Cost of printing. Comment was made that printing costs for students are higher in MIC than is the norm for Irish higher education. It is recommended that this matter is reviewed.

- Trolleys. The trolleys in the Library are not adequate within the constraints of the existing buliding and need to be replaced. In view of the uneven surfaces that need to be negotiated, ball wheels would be more appropriate.

- Photocopying cards. Additional card dispensers in different locations across the campus would assist students in the management of their time.

- Signage. This needs to be modernized to follow best practice as the organization of collections and facilities is not always intuitive within the constraints of the Library Building.

- Z39.50. It was observed that this does not always work effectively. It is recognized that this is an inexact process but we recommend that the Z39.50 facility in TALIS is evaluated to ensure it is working effectively. If this proves to be the case then expectations in relation to this sevice need to be managed by promoting more clearly the benefits and limitations of the technology

- New acquisitions. Readers expressed a wish to see details of new acquisitions in a more helpful way. These could be circulated by email or using a blog.

- Online access to journals. It was reported that UL journals listings are not always completely up to date. It is suggested that this is drawn to the attention of UL library as helpful feedback

- External user scheme. Concern was expressed that external readers were using space at times when reading space is at a premium. Rather than discouraging such use, consideration should be given to providing access at defined times which do not adversely impact on the usage patterns of students and staff.

- Journals. Representatives of academic staff were of the view that it would be helpful if journals could be divided by broad subject.

- Noise. More active consideration should be given to noise management. This could include enclosing areas which carry noise from one floor to the next, zoning areas as silent, quiet or group learning spaces, etc. and permitting mobile telephony only in designated areas e.g. stair landings. It should be noted that some students reported that they had stopped using the Library because of the noise problems. Some of these ideas have already been implemented but a more comprehensive reconfiguration of Library space would do much to improve the situation.

- Short loan collection. More active management of the collection should be considered so that as modules are completed learning materials can be released for more general use.

- Fines. Students wished to suggest that fines regulations are more actively publicised. They are supportive of the fine levels.

- Code of practice for customer care. Existing good practice in providing service to students needs to be further reinforced by the establishment of formal standards. This should be an exercise in which all Library staff play a part to demonstrate the care which they have for users of the service.

- Wall space. More effective use of wall space would increase the shelving capacity of the library. This would need to take into account health and safety regulations, risk assessment principles and accessibility.

- Shelving. In certain areas of the Library shelving is not used optimally where paperbacks and flimsy material are housed. This could easily be remedied by using shelf dividers which reach from the top to the bottom of each shelf space.

- Research space As new space becomes available to the Library, consideration should be given to the provision of designated areas for research students.

- Queuing. It may be possible to reduce queuing by reconfiguring certain service areas. For example photocopiers might be so designated that small scale (express service) photocopying is permitted on some machines while high volume activity is restricted to others.

- Suggestions box. A suggestions box should be introduced to provide an additional means of listening to the student voice.

- Survey methodology. In the development of User Satisfaction Surveys care should be taken to ensure that where there is negative feedback this is evidenced so that appropriate action can be taken. It is envisaged that this would involve close co-operation with, and support from, the MIC Quality Office.

5.0   CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is quite evident that all the Library staff are willingly engaged in a process of change and modernisation with the objective of improving the student and staff experience. The above recommendations and observations provide an agenda for change and the Review Group members are confident their implementation will ensure that the Library remains a significant element in the delivery of the mission of Mary Immaculate College to promote excellence in teaching, learning and research.