



**Quality Review
Peer Review Report
Department of Music**

May 2023

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Introduction

MIC's quality review process, as applied to both academic departments and professional services, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy the College's [Quality Policy](#) and meet legislative QA requirements. MIC complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), which places a legal responsibility on the provider and linked provider to establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services. (Part 3, Section 28). These QA procedures must take due account of relevant quality guidelines issued by [Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(QQI\)](#) and/or predecessor organisations. QQI is the statutory body responsible for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of QA procedures adopted and implemented by higher (and further) educational institutions within Ireland. The periodic quality review of functional areas (academic and professional service) within the College represents a cornerstone institutional QA/QE mechanism.

MIC's Quality Review Process

The purpose of the quality review process is:

- To provide a structured opportunity for the department to engage in periodic and strategic evidence-based self-reflection and assessment in the context of the quality of its activities and processes, and to identify opportunities for quality improvement
- To provide a framework by which external peers, in an evidence-based manner, can independently review, evaluate, report upon and suggest improvements to the quality of the department's activities and processes
- To provide a framework by which the department implements quality improvements in a verifiable manner
- To provide MIC, its students, its prospective students and other stakeholders with independent evidence of the quality of the department's activities
- To ensure that all MIC departments are evaluated in a systematic and standardised manner in accordance with good international practice and in support of the objectives of the College's Quality Policy
- To satisfy good international practice in the context of quality assurance in higher education and to meet statutory QA requirements as enshrined in national law

Overview of the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments

The MIC Quality Review process consists of three phases:

1. **Self-Assessment**

The department under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR)

2. **Peer Review**

A Peer Review Group (PRG) comprising external experts, review the SAR, meet with Department members and stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the MIC Quality Office webpage

3. **Quality Improvement.**

The department considers the recommendations of the PRG, devises a quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to implement them and reports implementation progress to Quality Committee and MIC Executive Team.

Department of Music

The Department of Music offers music as an arts subject for the BA in Liberal Arts and music electives for the B Ed in Primary Teaching. It also supervises graduate students at MA and Ph.D. level by research in Musicology and Music Education and offers a taught MA in Music Education in association with the Department of Arts Education and Physical Education.

The Department is staffed by three full-time permanent members: [Dr Gareth Cox](#) (appointed lecturer 1993 and subsequently HoD and Senior Lecturer 1999); [Dr Paul Collins](#) (appointed lecturer 1999); [Dr Michael Murphy](#) (appointed lecturer 2001). [Dr Desi Wilkinson](#) is the part-time lecturer in Irish Traditional Music.

Peer Review Group Observations

At all stages of the review process—pre-visit planning, on-site visit and post-visit compilation of this report—the work of the Peer Review Group (PRG) was generously supported and assisted by the Quality Office and its Director, Deirdre Ryan. The PRG was well briefed on its remit and on the review process, practical arrangements were well organized, and additional documentation requested during the site visit was supplied in a timely manner. While at MIC on 4th-6th April 2023, the PRG found all staff to be highly professional, accommodating and hospitable. The Quality Office liaised throughout with MIC staff to supply answers to questions posed by the PRG. Meetings with stakeholders took place as planned, including some helpful adjustments to the schedule when the PRG required additional meeting time with some stakeholders and a valuable exchange with the Dean of Arts who, though ill, was still willing to meet with us online. The Head of Department was particularly generous with his time, not least in providing the PRG with an informative tour of the College, highlighting the facilities and infrastructure available to the Music Department.

The PRG found its meetings with stakeholders productive and informative. Staff and students not only answered all the questions we put to them but also helpfully directed us to issues and lines of enquiry that we had not anticipated based on our pre-visit investigations. Indeed, we were struck by the honest and forthright manner of senior management, who, while justifiably proud of the institution's reputation and accomplishments, were not in the least guarded or defensive when addressing the challenges it faces. As the visit progressed, the PRG became increasingly confident that it was being offered a realistic assessment of the quality of the activities, processes and provisions of the College and its support for the Music Department, its students and staff.

As for the Department, its openness to self-reflection was already evident to the PRG in the SAR which, we felt, deftly balanced appraisal of strengths with recognition of challenges and the need for change. It is clear from the SAR, for example, that the Department is aware of, and seeks to align itself with, the strategic priorities defined by the College in its Strategic Plan. Although it has not done so as yet, the Department has committed in the SAR to developing its own strategic plan. The SAR also demonstrated awareness that the Department identifies possible shortcomings in its curriculum and seeks change.

The PRG's positive impression of the SAR was confirmed during the site visit in three ways. First, touring the campus established for the PRG that the SAR had accurately assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the physical infrastructure. Second, staff in the Music Department were able and willing to elaborate on, and provide important historical and institutional context for, the SAR in ways that assisted the PRG's understanding of the rationale behind some of the strategic decisions undertaken at MIC. This assured the PRG of the substance of the claims outlined in the SAR and confirmed the urgency of some of its key conclusions. Third, our meetings with stakeholders corroborated the claims of the SAR. For example, several stakeholders echoed the alarm registered in the SAR in relation to the implementation of the CÉIM initiative and its potential to impact negatively on Music and other departments in the Faculty of Arts. Senior management also confirmed the claim in the SAR that the collegial attitude of staff in the Department is one of its strengths, while the students with whom we met reinforced the claimed commitment to exceptional levels of pastoral care and a willingness to go the extra mile to deliver student-centred learning (including some frankly heroic efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on student learning and experience).

As impressed as the PRG is with the capacity of the department's academic staff to manage heavy teaching and service workloads while maintaining research profiles, we are concerned that these workloads lie outside sectoral norms and that the current model is unsustainable. Evidence suggests that in the absence of any viable alternative, staff repeatedly step in to ensure that processes and activities proceed, but this expectation is no substitute for adequate resourcing based on transparent workload models, and we urge the College to introduce an institution-wide workload model as soon as possible, not least to ensure that staff can continue to nurture their research careers and remain research-active. This should be underpinned by enhanced provisions for sabbatical leave, including resourcing for replacement teaching to ensure that adequate backfill is not an impediment when staff otherwise qualify for leave. Above all, though, the absence of regular rounds of promotion (for example, to Senior Lecturer) has, in our view, had a profound effect on staff morale, individually and collectively, and risks generating the impression that the exceptional effort we have described goes unrewarded. In the report that follows, we will make a number of recommendations, but we cannot stress enough the priority we attach to the issue of staff promotion.

Chapter 1: Vision, Mission, Strategy and Governance

Commendations

1.1	College: Facilities and physical infrastructure. <i>Performance, rehearsal and teaching space is impressive by national standards.</i>
1.2	College and Department: commitment to EDI through Athena Swan Bronze and reinforced by demonstrated departmental commitment to its principles.
1.3	Department: Commitment to revival of Music Consultation Group in parallel with institutional dialogue with UL.
1.4	College and Department: Commitment to pastoral care and student well-being. <i>This was confirmed by students interviewed by the PRG.</i>

Recommendations

1.1	College: Additional resourcing of Music Technology Studio to enable physical expansion and adequate staffing, including a music technician. <i>Compared to other facilities and infrastructure available to the Department, the Music Technology Studio is under-resourced both in terms of physical accommodation and staffing.</i>
1.2	College: Resource adequate support for promotion of the department's programmes, e.g., brochures and social media. <i>There is significant opportunity to promote the impressive facilities available to students in the Music Department, but this opportunity is not being taken.</i>
1.3	Department: Follow through on the commitment in the SAR to develop a departmental strategic plan.
1.4	Department: Promote BA programme and career possibilities for BA graduates beyond teaching.

Chapter 2: Organisation, Management and Staffing

Commendations

2.1	Department: Commitment and service to the institution, through participation in college committees and other bodies.
2.2	Department: Collegiality and sense of common purpose within the Department of Music and with colleagues in other departments and units.

Recommendations

2.1	College: Commit to and resource annual promotion rounds (i.e., promotions on merit, not functional senior lectureships) and clear existing backlog. <i>We encountered evidence that lack of opportunity for promotion is impacting on staff morale. In this respect MIC is lagging behind many third-level institutions.</i>
2.2	College: Commit to adequate levels of staffing, including at senior level. <i>Teaching and service workloads in the Music Department strike us as very high compared to sectoral norms.</i>

Chapter 3: Design, Content and Review of Curriculum

Commendations

3.1	Department: Breadth, depth, and especially progression of what is covered within the degree, given the constraints of an all-6-ECTS modular degree structure.
3.2	Department: Openness and diversity of what staff can and do supervise in undergraduate dissertations.
3.3	Department: Care and attention in coverage of Music graduate attributes, as outlined in §3.3.3 of the SAR.
3.4	Department: Staff awareness of the need for development and change to degree programmes.

Recommendations

3.1	College: Reconsider implementation of the CÉIM initiative. <i>The PRG encountered significant disquiet within the Music Department and Faculty of Arts over the potential effects of the initiative on demand for Music and other arts electives and the timing of those electives within the course.</i>
3.2	Department: Reduce the number of music history-based modules by at least one, possibly two. <i>This would free up space for the introduction of modules in non-historical areas, and reflect recent changes to the discipline. Possible modules are suggested in the recommendations below.</i>
3.3	Department: Introduce a module focusing on the musician in society/sociology of music (content to be developed by staff).
3.4	Department: Consider the introduction of either/both a) musical entrepreneurship, b) the psychology of music within the degree. <i>The introduction of the latter module could also be used to develop a basic knowledge of music therapy, given the popularity of this topic among final-year projects.</i>
3.5	Department: Introduce classes throughout the degree devoted to the development of performance skills in group settings (including, perhaps, harnessing the student enthusiasm for musical theatre). <i>This is in line with equivalent modules in other institutions.</i>
3.6	Department: Consider making final-year performance optional. <i>This would address EDII concerns about students having to fund instrumental/vocal lessons themselves.</i>
3.7	Department: Consider introduction of a PME in second-level teaching at MIC Limerick.

Chapter 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback

Commendations

4.1	Department: Innovation in modes of assessments, including student choice of assessment within an individual module.
4.2	Department: Extent and breadth of research-informed teaching.

Recommendations

4.1	Department: Clear, transparent gradated marking criteria for all types of assessment (written, performance, notation-based, creative).
4.2	Department: Develop student peer feedback for formative assessment in performance. <i>This could take place as part of performance 'workshops' to help students prepare for performance examinations and alleviate some of the concerns that students have about instrumental/vocal lessons being outside of the programme.</i>
4.3	Department: Review quantity of assessment in individual modules. <i>This is partly to relieve the workload burden on staff.</i>
4.4	Department: Extend innovative modes of assessment to other modules.

Chapter 5: The Student Experience

Commendations

5.1	College: Evidence of commitment to obtaining data on current students' experience, and process of dialogue with the student body
5.2	College: Effective long-term planning and resourcing for third-year placement
5.3	Department: Supportive, close-knit community, both within student body, and between students and staff
5.4	Department: Staff engagement in student music-making (e.g., concerts, musicals)
5.5	Department: Evidence of a positive student response to the Department's commitment to mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

5.1	College: Continue to encourage a diversification of types of placement, and the student take-up of them.
5.2	Department: Increase opportunities for music-making within the degree.
5.3	Department: More student participation in concerts on campus.

Chapter 6: Research Activity

Commendations

6.1	College: Generous support for conference attendance compared to sectoral norms.
6.2	Department: Evidence of strong research profile and peer esteem of department.
6.3	Department: Contributions to national and international research initiatives, organisations, societies and publications.

Recommendations

6.1	College: Urgently addresses the need for adequately resourced sabbaticals to facilitate staff research activity (including arrangements for teaching backfill).
6.2	College: Offer a research publication fund in line with other institutions (e.g., NUI).
6.3	Department: Maximise use of existing research funding opportunities within the college for seed funding, conference support and individual research support.
6.4	Develop a Departmental strategy (and associated action plan) for integrating research into teaching and learning, in particular, research-based learning for students, e.g. introducing research and writing skills for undergraduates from Year 1.

Chapter 7: Community Outreach Activity

Commendations

7.1.1	Department: Close and wide engagement with community via music-making on and beyond campus.
7.1.2	Department: Successful engagement of artists-in-residence to facilitate public-facing events.

Recommendations

7.2.1	Department: More extensive promotion of concert activity on social media.
7.2.2	Department: Apply for new Artist-in-Residence funding

Annex 1: Peer Review Group Members

Name	Role & Institution
<u>Professor Denise Neary</u>	Head of Doctoral Academic Studies Royal Irish Academy of Music
<u>Professor Christopher Morris</u> (Chair)	Department of Music Maynooth University
<u>Dr Aidan Thomson</u>	Head of Music University of Galway

Annex 2: List of stakeholder meetings

Day 1	
	Stakeholder Meetings
	Director of Quality
	Dr Gareth Cox, Head of Department
	Dr Paul Collins, Department Member
	Dr Michael Murphy, Department Member
	Dr Desi Wilkinson, Department Member
	Prof. William Leahy, Dean of Arts
Day 2	
	Meeting with Department Team
	Dr Gwen Moore, Director of Teaching & Learning
	Dr Geraldine Brosnan, Director of Student Life
	Dr Richard Butler, Director of Research
	Undergraduate Students (BA & B Ed Programmes)
	Ms Patricia Casserly, Placement Office Manager