



## Peer Review Group Report

### Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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# 1 Introduction and Context

The broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement at DCU aims to promote and develop a culture of quality throughout all aspects of the University. The framework derives from the spirit of Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement enshrined in the Universities Act (1997), which is the legislative basis for quality throughout the Irish University sector, and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. The DCU processes for quality reviews at DCU are further aligned to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the published guidelines of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI).

This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the **Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**, following a visit by a Peer Review Group (PRG) undertaken from **3 to 6 December 2019**.

A very significant change in the size and character of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences occurred in 2015-16, midway between the previous Quality Review in 2009 and the present review. Three other institutions, each with its own personality, staff and campus, were formally incorporated into DCU: St Patrick's College, Mater Dei Institute of Education and the Church of Ireland College of Education. Most academic areas from the incoming institutions joined the new DCU Institute of Education and a small number joined other Schools within DCU but over 60 staff became part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. This enlarged the Faculty from four to seven Schools, and, through the inclusion of academic disciplines such as English, History, Geography, Theology, Philosophy and Music, broadened and changed the Faculty's character so that it now offers a range of programmes in the Humanities and Social Sciences that is comparable to that on offer in other Irish universities.

Even after four years, these changes are still evolving. In many respects the Dean and his colleagues in the Faculty have coped well with the very considerable challenges presented by incorporation changes, and have responded positively to the opportunities, to which such change gives rise. The PRG recognises and comments on this in this report. However, the PRG also sees a good deal more that could and should be done in advancing the work of the Faculty and hopes that such comments as offered, and the recommendations that are made in this report, will be helpful in achieving this.

The remit of this report is limited to the Faculty in question, but some context is useful. Incorporation and the consequent growth means it is now the largest Faculty in DCU in both staff and student numbers. It now also offers a wide range of disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences; delivering a change in the overall character of the University as a whole which ought to be more widely recognised within and outside the institution. Since DCU was given university status in 1989, it has gained a positive reputation for flexibility and innovation, in comparison to some of the older universities. However, it has also been seen as an institution which, though it included certain disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, nevertheless concentrated on, and excelled in, more technical and scientific areas of education. With its now greatly expanded Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences provision, DCU has to be seen as having matured into a more broad-based University in which a well-established reputation for innovation and flexibility in disciplines with a practical and technical focus is complemented by a wide range of equally innovative offerings in the Humanities and Social Sciences; and in which the Humanities & Social Sciences are valued for their role in human development and not only for their instrumental role in relation to students' future employment prospects.

## 1.1 Overview of the Area under Review

### *Functions and activities*

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences is the largest Faculty grouping in DCU in terms of both staff and student numbers. It is currently organised into seven Schools: (1) Applied Language and Intercultural Studies; (2) Communications; (3) English; (4) Fiontar agus Scoil na

Gaeilge; (5) History and Geography; (6) Law and Government; and, (7) Theology, Philosophy, and Music. The Faculty also hosts a number of University-recognised Research Institutes and Centres, including the Centre for Jazz Performance Studies.

Governance and leadership of the activities of the Faculty are overseen by the Faculty Management Board (FMB) and its Faculty Research Committee (FTC), Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (FTLC) and Faculty External Engagement Committee (FEEC), (which replaced a previously existing but more narrowly focused Faculty Marketing Committee). Each of these sub committees is chaired by the appropriate Associate Dean, has representatives (Convenors) from each of the seven Schools and has operational support from a senior member of the administrative team. Internal management of the Faculty centres on the FMB which is chaired by the Executive Dean and includes, as full members, the Heads of School, the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning, the Associate Dean for Research, the Associate Dean for External Engagement and the Faculty Manager.

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences currently delivers 13 undergraduate programmes and 31 postgraduate taught programmes (see Table 1). Nine of these programmes have been developed since 2015. The Faculty currently has over 3600 students.

**Table 1: Overview of programmes**

School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate Taught
Applied Language and Intercultural Studies	<p>BA in Applied Language and Translation Studies (Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Spanish)</p> <p>BA in Social Sciences and Cultural Innovation</p> <p>French, German and Spanish on the Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme</p> <p>Teach language components outside of Faculty to the following</p> <p>BA Global Business (French/German/Spanish) DCUBS programme</p> <p>BA International Business (DCUBS programme)</p> <p>Bachelor of Education in Gaeilge and French or German or Spanish (jointly with Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge, Institute of Education)</p>	<p>MA in Translation Studies</p> <p>MSc in Translation Technology MA in Refugee Integration.</p>
Communications	<p>BA in Journalism</p> <p>BSc in Multimedia</p> <p>BA in Communication Studies</p> <p>Media Studies on the Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme.</p>	<p>MA in Journalism</p> <p>MA in Political Communication, MSc in Public Relations and Strategic Communication</p> <p>MSc in Emerging Media</p> <p>MSc in Science and Health Communication</p> <p>MA in Contemporary Screen Industries</p> <p>MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media, and Society (jointly with Law and Government)</p> <p>MA in Social Media Communications.</p>
English	<p>English on the Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme.</p> <p>Bachelor of Religious Education and English (run in conjunction with School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music DCU Institute of Education)</p>	<p>MA in Creative Writing</p> <p>MA in Children's and Young Adult Literature</p>

Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge	Irish on the Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme Gnó agus Gaeilge [Business and Irish] Gaeilge, Iriseoireacht agus na Meáin Dhigiteacha [Irish, Journalism and Digital Media]. Bachelor of Education in Gaeilge and French or German or Spanish (jointly with SALIS, and DCU Institute of Education) Gaeilge on B.Ed (Primary)	MSc in Gnó agus i dTeicneolaíocht an Eolais [Business and Information Technology]
History and Geography	History and Geography are offered as subjects on: Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme, BEd (primary). Bachelor of Religious Education and History (run in conjunction with School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music and DCU Institute of Education)	MA in History and Geography Teach into MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media and Society
Law and Government	BA in International Relations Bachelor of Civil Law, BA in Economics, Politics and Law, Both Law and Politics on the Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme.	MA in International Relations, MA in International Security and Conflict Studies LLM (Masters in Law) MSc in Public Policy MA in European Law and Policy, MA in Data Protection and Privacy Law (jointly with the School of Computing) MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media, and Society (jointly with the School of Communications) International Master's in Security, Intelligence, and Strategic Studies, (delivered jointly with the University of Glasgow and Charles University, Prague)
Theology, Philosophy, and Music	BA programme in Jazz and Contemporary Music BA in Theology and Religious Studies (part-time, flexible) Theology and Religious Studies, Music, and Philosophy offered as separate subjects on Bachelor of Arts: Joint Honours programme  Religious Studies on Bachelor of Religious Education and English/History/Music  Music on Bachelor of Religious Education and Music	MA in Theology MA in Ethics MA in Ethics (Corporate Responsibility) MA in Choral Studies

Research in the Faculty is conducted through each of the seven schools and in 11 University recognised Research Centres (see Table 2). The Faculty has invested resources – including leadership – to support its Strategic Plan in areas such as research priorities and research support; growing capacity; growing the quality and impact of publications; collaboration and partnerships; leadership development; external profile and social impact. Support mechanisms have included funding schemes such as the Journal Article Support Scheme, Book Publication Support Scheme, Conference Travel Scheme, Research Workshop Scheme, Research Fellowship and Journal Article Support Scheme (Postgraduate Students). Using the criteria set by the University Research Office, the proportion of Faculty staff who are ‘research active’ has moved from an average of 46 percent in 2011 (the baseline year) to 69 percent in 2019.

**Table 2: University Recognised Research Centres**

Cluster / Centre	Home School
DCU Centre for Children's Literature and Culture	English
Irish Centre for Poetry Studies	English
DCU Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue	Theology, Philosophy, and Music
DCU Institute of Ethics	Theology, Philosophy, and Music
DCU Centre for Translation and Textual Studies	SALIS
DCU Institute for Future Media and Journalism	Communications
DCU Law Research Centre	Law and Government
DCU Brexit Institute	Law and Government
DCU Ireland India Institute	Law and Government
DCU Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction	Law and Government
SEALBHÚ	Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge / Institute of Education (Cross Faculty Research Centre)

### Location

The Faculty has locations on three DCU campuses:

1. the Executive Dean and the Faculty Administrative Team, along with three schools – SALIS, Communications, and Law and Government – are based on the Glasnevin Campus;
2. three further schools – Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge, English, and Theology, Philosophy, and Music – are located on the All Hallows Campus; and,
3. the School of History and Geography is located on the St Patrick's Campus.

### Staff

Faculty staffing numbers have changed – growing or staying stable in all Schools – since incorporation in 2016. Table 3 below sets out staff numbers in 2009 (the date of the last Quality Review), 2016 (the date of incorporation) and now in 2019. These are broken down by School to show academic staff, technical staff and externally funded research staff and administrative staff.

**Table 3: Staffing profile**

	2009	2016 (at Incorporation)	2019
Academic staff			
Communications	25	25	29
English	-	10.5	11.5
Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge	14	22	25
History and Geography	-	15.2	15.2
Law and Government	24	30	35
SALIS	38	35	38
Theology, Philosophy, and Music	-	17	23
Education Studies (left FHSS to join DCU Institute of Education in 2016)	10	-	-
Research contracts	17	35	50
School based administrative and technical staff	12	11	12
Faculty Administrative Team	8	11	14
TOTAL full-time staff	148	211.7	252.7

The Faculty is multilingual in its focus and activities – providing programmes to degree level in Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Irish, Japanese and Spanish. These are delivered by a

combination of full-time, part-time and sessional tutors, although not all supported by a research community. Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge teaches and functions through the medium of the Irish language, teaching into a number of programmes.

The Faculty Administrative Team, comprising 14 staff, provides professional administrative support – and directs some aspects of institutionally delivered support – for all Faculty constituent units including Schools, Research Centres/Groups and Institutes.

## **2 Approach to Self-Assessment**

### **2.1 Quality Review Committee**

The self-assessment phase of the Quality Review was led by an internal QR committee consisting:

- John Doyle, Executive Dean
- Goretti Daughton, Faculty Manager
- Brad Anderson, Head, School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music
- Françoise Blin, Head, SALIS
- Derek Hand, Head, School of English
- James Kelly, Head, School of History and Geography
- Tanya Lokot, Associate Dean for External Engagement
- Ken McDonagh, Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning
- Iain McMenamin, Head, School of Law and Government
- Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, Head, Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge
- Eugene McNulty, Associate Dean for Research
- Kevin Rafter, Head, School of Communications

Preparation for the review began in January 2019. The Faculty quality review was a standing item on the Faculty Management Board throughout the year. All seven schools and the Faculty Administrative Team held individual meetings and/or away days in late spring/early summer to complete a School-based SWOC and to feed into the Faculty SAR. The Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee and Faculty Research Committee also completed SWOCs and fed into the FMB. Focus groups with undergraduate and postgraduate students were organised to solicit student opinion and to ensure visibility of the student experience in the review. In autumn 2019 the Executive Dean met each School and Faculty Administrative Team with a draft report then being presented to a full Faculty meeting in October 2019. The report itself was initially drafted by the Dean, the Associate Deans and the Faculty Manager and then discussed and revised by the full Faculty Management Board.

### **2.2 The Self-Assessment Report**

Overall, the review team found that the SAR and its appendices were extremely well prepared and professionally presented. The report was found to be comprehensive and thorough, showing a good level of self-awareness, albeit with limited evidence of how the SAR process engaged with alumni, employers and other external stakeholders. Overall the report provides an excellent overview of the Faculty, its functions and structures, and its seven schools and research centres, with good evidence of some input from key stakeholders. The Faculty SWOC analysis, and the SWOC for the individual Schools, showed evidence of self-reflection by staff in determining both their current position and identifying some of the opportunities open to the Faculty.

Overall, the SAR and its appendices were sufficiently detailed to allow the PRG to gain in depth knowledge of the Faculty, its current position and to understand some aspects of future direction. Nonetheless, reflecting on the future plans and projects of the Faculty, the PRG considered that the review's self-analysis and reflection might have been more convincingly embedded in terms of its link to planning and, specifically, linking more clearly to the vision and strategic plan presented in the Appendices.

The SAR findings were reviewed by the PRG on a section-by-section basis. These findings were, in the main, endorsed and confirmed during the course of the site visit and are discussed below.

### **3 Approach Taken by Peer Review Group**

#### **3.1 Peer Review Group Members**

Membership of the PRG for the Quality Review was:

- **Noel Dorr** – Former Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, former Ambassador to the UK and to the United Nations
- **David Galbreath** – Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bath
- **Margaret Heffernan** (appointed rapporteur for the review group) – Assistant Professor, DCU Business School, Dublin City University
- **Jim Livesey** – Dean of School of Humanities, University of Dundee
- **Brien Nolan** – Associate Professor, School of Mathematical Sciences, Dublin City University
- **Adrienne Scullion** (nominated chair of the review group) – Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Queen's University Belfast

#### **3.2 Overview of Approach Taken by Peer Review Group**

Having been supplied with the report electronically in advance, the PRG met with the Director of Quality Promotions on the evening of 3 December. This meeting outlined the format of the visit, along with an overview of the aims and objectives of the review process. After this meeting the PRG met privately and Adrienne Scullion was identified to chair the PRG. Following a general discussion of the SAR, the Preliminary Comments document (previously completed by PRG members) was discussed with several themes emerging as areas for consideration over the course of the Quality Review. (See Appendix 1 for details of the main meetings, parallel sessions and an overview of attendees.) It was agreed that, for the parallel sessions, the PRG would split as follows: David Galbreath, Brien Nolan, Adrienne Scullion; and, Noel Dorr, Margaret Heffernan, Jim Livesey. A professional note taker (Mark Collins) was engaged to take notes during the Quality Review together with Celine Heffernan for parallel sessions. These notes were invaluable to the PRG given the depth and scope of the review – and such a resource is recommended for future reviews across the University.

Reflecting on the work achieved, the PRG considered that the overall review process undertaken by the Faculty had been thorough and that the PRG had full access to all appropriate stakeholders – Faculty staff and students, research students, external stakeholders, central services staff, the President, Deputy President and Senior Management Group. Overall, engagement with the PRG was extremely positive and participants were largely open and engaged with the process giving honest and valuable comments and feedback on a wide range of issues. Building on the work that had already underpinned the SAR, engagement with Faculty and QPO staff throughout the review was professional and accommodating: requests made for additional information throughout the review were fulfilled by either Faculty or QPO staff.

### **4 Approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The last Quality Review of the Faculty took place in 2009. Since then the Faculty has experienced significant changes, many the consequence of incorporation in 2016. At that date, three new schools joined the Faculty (English; History and Geography; and, Theology, Philosophy, and Music) and Roinn na Gaeilge merged with Fiontar. While most of the previous PRG recommendations have been implemented completely, others are still in progress, perhaps as a result of these major structural changes.

The successes achieved in creating and building a new Faculty – both operationally and culturally – from the previously existing and incorporating units, cannot be underestimated. To date this



work has been taken seriously and has delivered much. Nonetheless, the PRG came to the view that, despite the undoubted achievements, there is still work to be done in moving forward as a clearly defined academic unit. In consequence, some of its recommendations focus on the operational and structural, as well as cultural and strategic, aspects of building and stewarding a vibrant and important Faculty grouping.

Reviewing the current position, the PRG noted that the Faculty has seen significant investment in the refurbishment of the Henry Grattan teaching, research and office spaces. Language laboratories and media rooms have also benefited from investment in technology and the redesign of the classroom spaces. Overall much of the built infrastructure is good and generally meets the needs of teaching, learning and research in the Faculty. The PRG also noted that the Faculty has progressed the implementation of a Faculty-wide workload document and given thoughtful consideration to the research profile of diverse Faculty members by, for example, identifying monographs and creative outputs as key output types, thus augmenting the University's prior focus on highly-ranked journal articles. The Faculty Research Committee has embraced its role of managing the process of distributing internal research funding through a formal and transparent process, well-supported by evidence. The Marketing Committee has become the Faculty Committee for External Engagement and was created to address the marketing recommendations in the previous review. An Associate Dean for External Engagement is now in post, with responsibilities including chairing this committee. However, the capacity of that committee and role to influence beyond the Faculty may be limited as, unlike other Associate Dean roles, it does not feed into a University-wide committee.

The areas where progress has not been so clearly achieved are highlighted in this PRG report. These include: reflections on the profile – including research profile – of Humanities and Social Sciences within and outside the University; the Faculty's portfolio of taught programmes (looking at sustainability and their administration and management); and, the Faculty's identity as projected through its marketing activities and manifested in strategic planning.

## **5 Findings of the Peer Review Group**

### **5.1 Planning and Overall Strategic Direction of the Area**

Recognising that planning and strategy have to align disciplines and Schools through Faculty to the wider University, the PRG's recommendations in this area have reference to Faculty, Schools and the University.

#### *A culture of engagement*

Overall, planning and business strategy for the Faculty is secure and built on the strong academic culture of the unit. Faculty leadership is visible and effective and the executive group, led by the Executive Dean, clearly exemplifies its core values. Indeed, in meetings with the different membership groups of the Faculty a coherent set of values and goals were consistently invoked. The PRG saw clearly that the nine stated Faculty strategic goals, as identified in the current strategic plan, accurately represent those values and that the same values were evident in the process of self-reflection. There may be scope for the team to work more on directing these embodied values into a more clearly articulated vision and future strategy. The PRG also acknowledge that the current Faculty Strategy Plan engaged with staff throughout the Faculty via multiple meetings at Faculty level, at School level and in thematic committees. We commend this approach and recommend that the Faculty ensure that all of the staff share these values and have a clear sense of the future strategic thinking for the Schools. This recommendation aligns with the finding on communication below, but it goes beyond that. Empowering leadership within the Executive Dean and Management team *and* creating fora within which all colleagues can positively contribute to strategic direction across and between portfolios can create capacity for successful change management and drive the Faculty forward as a coherent and cohesive area of academic excellence.

### *Reviewing School structures*

The Faculty is still in the process of developing its identity and we recommend that more attention be paid to this process. The PRG identified a risk that the process of integration of all staff into a new, shared mission may need to be intensified otherwise Schools, disciplines and colleagues may find themselves in silos. This would be particularly unfortunate given the comparative advantage that colleagues in the Faculty have already identified in interdisciplinary work, both in research and in the provision of teaching programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A specific recommendation is that the current school structure be interrogated with a view to meaningful revision in terms of the Faculty's strategic ambitions. The current school structure reflects the context of formation of the Faculty at incorporation rather than its future potential and vision. Whilst it falls beyond the scope of this review to make specific recommendations for alternative structures, the PRG also noted that the wide variety in size, scope and disciplinary reach of the Schools makes it very difficult to ensure consistency in the student experience, research performance and achieve meaningful academic coherence.

### *Reviewing business systems*

The Faculty Management Board is well structured and the committee structure reflects the division of labour – albeit with the potential for greater effective leadership – among the Associate Deans. The Faculty Manager and her team perform at a high level, are respected both within and outside the Faculty, and clearly approach their work with a determination to overcome any difficulties and to ensure the aspirations of the Faculty are achieved. The workload model is consistently applied and incentivises high quality activity – but has, as yet, not been mobilised as an effective planning tool. The financial performance of the Faculty is strong and reflects the commendable work at all levels in the University to manage resources in a challenging funding context. However, the yearly planning horizon does not articulate with the potential for a strong strategic direction for an emerging and ambitious Faculty and a different model of academic planning and budget setting – perhaps on a three-year cycle – should be considered. The PRG considers that there is significant scope for innovation in the planning cycle and recommend a more regular, accountable and high-level interaction of Faculty leadership with leaders in HR, Estates, and External Affairs as well as the Finance Office. Indeed, overall the PRG considered that the effective leadership culture in the Faculty could support a more client- and service-orientated relationship with the University's professional services. The PRG also identified a lacuna within the Faculty, where School budgets are not developed with the same eye to strategic direction as the Faculty budget. We recommend that the Faculty develop a more strategic role in the allocation of the budget to its constituent units. A major priority for the Faculty should be to develop a staffing plan that reflects its overall vision and strategic direction.

An area of work where immediate and decisive intervention and investment will make an institution-wide difference is around IT, data management and data analysis. It is recommended that the University complete, as soon as possible, the replacement/updating of the IT solutions that currently support its work, with a particular priority being on the Student Information Systems and the systems that connect with that. (This recommendation is also relevant to the use of resources and is reiterated in that subsection.) The PRG heard that data is difficult to find and there is no single source of truth. As a result, in this area and others, colleagues develop ad hoc solutions to particular problems and, while this is to be commended in terms of taking responsibility for effective delivery, it is also, at the very least, an inefficient work model. In terms of planning for programme development we recommend the use of evidence and data. There is an urgent need to integrate academic insight and professional service, particularly in developing programmes that look to international recruitment. We further recommend that the Faculty develop an explicit process through which it can assess how activities and programmes are withdrawn and closed as well as enhanced and grown.

Whilst explicit research management is not a feature of the Faculty, the PRG does commend the sensitive and appropriate way in which research administration, orientated primarily toward research assessment and support for research activity, is conducted. 20 percent of income coming from major research grants may be considered high for a Humanities and Social Science Faculty and we recommend that planning processes recognise this strength and develop strategies that can sustain this aspect of the Faculty. From a basis of growing research strength,

we recommend that the Faculty reflect on how its vision and strategy could and should influence proactively the overall DCU vision and strategy.

### *New policies*

Additionally, the PGR recommends that, as systems improve and as administrative capacity is released, the Faculty look to develop policies and procedures in other areas relevant to contemporary learning, teaching and research and, particularly, with regard to issues around equality and diversity. Whilst, the PRG notes the consistent reporting of gender characteristics in the data provided, it also recommends that Faculty leadership should have easy access to live data that can inform it about the profile of its learners, including first-generation entrants, black and minority ethnic groups, such as migrants and travellers, and sexual orientation for both staff and students. Effective and meaningful policies in these areas, as well as compliance with equality legislation, aligns with the Faculty's clear sense of its values but also depends on good information.

## **5.2 Effective Management of Resources**

The PRG found that the 'Effective Management of Resources' for the Faculty of Humanities centred on four resource areas - Communications; Training; IT systems and data analysis; Multi-site working – and makes recommendations in each that would support and enhance a more strategic and operationally smart Faculty.

### *Communications*

The Faculty has grown significantly since the 2016 incorporation to include 3,600 students and over 250 staff. The significant change in the distribution and number of staff and students that resulted has challenged the core culture, identity and sense of purpose of the Faculty. As such, the PRG found that, alongside recommendations to continue to engage staff in planning, a communications resource and plan was needed to continue beyond the process of incorporation whether team members were co-located or not.

Currently the Faculty has no internal communications resource that can be applied to building Faculty culture and identity much less brand. Marketing and Communications is centrally managed in the University and, rightly, focuses on student recruitment. Communications with staff and students is dominated by the School structures, transactional activities and/or through programme chairs. The PRG recommends that the Faculty devise a communications strategy that takes into account the limits of email, that builds on the momentum of the SAR and that seeks to reach the distributed staff and students across its three sites. Such a communications strategy could and should link to the development of vision, strategy and culture by engaging staff with such questions as how planning is undertaken and delivered, how research opportunities and findings are communicated, how pedagogic practice is best shared and how the student experience can be enhanced to benefit – or at least not disbenefit – from the multi-sited Faculty. Furthermore, an effective identity-building exercise could do more to find those themes and interests that are most shared across the Schools. Therefore, alongside the structural review recommended above, the PRG would encourage the Faculty to establish research- and teaching-related themes that represent the Faculty's overlapping areas of excellence and that these themes, as well as its disciplines, drive its planning and its internal and external profiling.

### *Personal and professional development*

DCU continues to professionalise its processes and structures that mirror how other sectors and areas of industry operate. Through this change, there is a need to maintain training to 'upskill' staff in using information systems (finance, registry, timetabling, programme resources) most effectively and efficiently. Currently DCU provides training at the University level. The SAR states that 'Standard Operating Procedures are maintained locally to facilitate desk training but it has been identified through regular process reviews that additional University-level training is required to optimise system engagement.' (Page 78.) The PRG found that training could indeed be bolstered across a number of areas including, registry, finance, research grant management, student-staff communication, and use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The PRG notes

the University's efforts to encourage training. However, it found that there are occasions when training has not reached those most in need. We would encourage the appropriate resourcing of training at a Faculty cohort level – further to tailor training while building a sense of community amongst personnel in the Faculty. Additionally, the PRG would encourage the Human Resources to establish a project on professional development that would review its current provision – in respect of teaching, research, career development – encourage an effective use of the training provided for those who need it most.

Discussion with teaching staff highlighted the importance of the Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU) to support teaching within the Faculty. Whilst engagement with TEU was positive, one issue highlighted was the timing of the Loop training session in late August and the Teaching and Learning Day in September. It was reported that many new staff do not start work until the start of September and so miss many of these important aspects of TEU training. The PRG recommends the timing of such events be reviewed to accommodate the usual dates that new staff begin their contracts. There is further scope for the appropriate Associate Dean to lead on this agenda for the benefit of all staff.

#### *IT systems and data analysis*

The PRG heard considerable evidence on the limits of IT systems and data analysis in DCU. This included evidence of inefficient working practices to either interrogate IT systems and match sources or to make great efforts to work around such systems. The issue was also raised in the SAR saying that, 'these systems, which are not connected dynamically, require manual update and transfer of data to manage processes and to provide all relevant information to support Faculty decisions. \*\*This creates a risk of error or omission and is resource intensive and time-consuming.\*\*' (Page 78.) This issue was reflected and repeated in our conversations with academic and professional support staff, but especially among School and Faculty administration. The PRG also heard concerns from research-funded staff on the lack of financial information and analysis that would aid in managing large grants. The professionalisation of DCU depends on the quality of systems and data that can provide informed strategic and operational decision-making. The SAR and PRG visit indicate that this is a major challenge to the consolidation of the Faculty and to working across a multi-sited campus. The PRG notes that the University purchased a new Student Information System (SIS) that is a five-year programme set to be initiated in AY 2020-21 and recommends that the Faculty closely monitors the effective integration of this with other University systems. The ongoing and additional need to address other aspects of the complex business of the University with appropriate systems remains.

#### *Multi-site working*

To this point, many of the issues identified in the SAR have involved multi-site working across three separate campuses. The challenge that the Faculty feels in relation to the distribution of staff and students was expressed in almost every meeting that the PRG had with Faculty members. While there may be future opportunities to co-locate the Faculty, this sits beyond the scope and mandate of this review and report. Students – especially undergraduate students – indicated frustrations with the time needed to move between campuses, the noise levels at St Patrick's campus library and the distribution and location of library resources across the three campuses. Staff indicated a lack of social and community-building activities and spaces between and across the three campuses and the lack of resources dedicated to incentivising staff to visit other sites. The PRG saw a lack of transportation infrastructure between the Glasnevin campus and both All Hallows and St Patrick's, with a significant impact on timetabling and scheduling. The multi-sited nature of the Faculty was presented to the PRG as the preeminent challenge to 'effective activities and processes' for and in the Faculty and there was little doubt in the Faculty that a co-located Faculty would enhance its effectiveness. At the same time, a live strategy for dealing with a multi-sited campus was less clear, perhaps because of the focus on co-location as the preferred solution.

The PRG finds that smarter working practices between and across campuses could be established that would allow for better coordination and collaboration between and across Schools – and to do more to take forward a Faculty vision and culture. The effective use of space, activities and processes would be greatly enhanced by better connectivity between these three

sites. Although the PRG noted that this Faculty is unique within DCU in being itself multi-sited, this is an issue for the whole University to address, especially in the context of enhancing the student experience, driving multi- and trans-disciplinary learning and research and effective resource management. The PRG recommends that a clearer articulated strategy be considered to enhance the connectivity of the three sites.

### **5.3 Overall Approach to Teaching and Learning**

The Faculty delivers a wide and diverse range of programmes incorporating 13 undergraduate programmes and 31 postgraduate taught programmes. There is also a significant amount of teaching into other Faculties, including languages and law to DCU Business School and a significant input into programmes in DCU Institute of Education.

In meetings with postgraduate students, the PRG heard strong evidence of very positive feedback and high levels of student satisfaction indicating that the programme teams are effective in delivering these programmes. Students praised the approachability of staff but issues around integration of international students during induction and provision of working space emerged during meetings with taught postgraduate students. In particular, the lack of a postgraduate study space at the St Patricks Campus library – and indeed appropriate study space at the Glasnevin campus library too – emerged as an issue.

At undergraduate level student feedback was more mixed. Students on programmes which naturally belonged within a School indicated overall satisfaction with programme delivery. However, comments on programmes which were delivered across the Faculty (e.g. the BA Joint Honours degree) were less positive. Despite its importance in the overall offering at DCU, and its appeal to students, this degree in particular seems to ‘fall through the cracks’ in terms of ownership and accountability of module content, assessments, feedback etc. when compared to other undergraduate degrees delivered within the Faculty.

#### *Unique and distinctive provision*

There was good evidence of the Faculty’s research agenda linking into taught programme curriculum and particularly new programme development. Since 2015, nine new programmes have been introduced. For example, in response to opportunities presented by prominent societal issues such as Climate Change and Security, the Faculty has exploited its research expertise to launch an MSc in Climate Change and an International Master in Security, Intelligence and Strategic Studies. The PRG also positively note alternative models for sourcing postgraduate students, for example with partnerships via Erasmus+ International Masters and teaching in the areas of translation as an area of practice and Jazz Studies which offers something unique.

The Bachelor of Art Joint Honours programme (BAJH) is the programme which is most impacted by incorporation and is also the programme which can help build the Faculty’s particular identity externally. As such its current programme offerings should be reviewed and examined to identify what differentiates a BA in DCU from its competitors. The PRG recommends the Faculty, when engaging with University Curriculum review process and the review of School structures, conduct an in-depth review of all undergraduate programmes with particular focus on BA Joint Honours degree to inform current programmes and design a BAJH programme which links to the Faculties’ identity and the values of DCU. This should drive the future of programme planning with a view to changing or withdrawing some programme offerings which might no longer be viable.

The PRG notes the positive view taken by both students and external partners of INTRA arrangements which allow Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) students to take internships in external companies such as legal firms. The PRG was informed that there has been a similar long-standing experience of INTRA placement in the BA in Journalism. The PRG recognises that the Faculty are currently preparing to mainstream INTRA onto a number of programmes, which would reinforce DCU’s commitment to employability and impact. Thus, the PRG recommends the continuation of a coordinated Faculty approach to identifying other programmes where the INTRA system of providing practical work experience *could* be relevant and helpful.

The SAR document detailed the importance of programme boards for programme management and, in particular, curriculum review via Annual and Periodic Programme Reviews. Specifically, the programme boards are avenues for discussion of programme changes and their impact, external examiner feedback, student issues and responses. The PRG visit highlighted issues with how programme boards are managed – finding that many programme boards are clustered together for ease of administration and attendance. This raises issues around whether the objectives of the board (as stated above) can be achieved in this current format. The PRG acknowledges the rationale for this clustering – for example given overlap of modules across programmes – but recommends a review of the current format to allow efficiency of administration but not at the cost of a proper functioning board to allow discussion of curriculum review and improvement.

#### *Assessment and feedback*

The PRG found evidence that a Faculty policy exists on the provision of student feedback on assessment stressing feedback should be given within three weeks of submission and that Loop can be used to assist in delivering such feedback. However, the panel found mixed evidence of this during its visit. Postgraduate students reported satisfaction with the nature of the in-depth feedback and timeliness (within three weeks of assignment submissions). This was not the case with undergraduate students who reported significant delays of up to two months in receiving feedback on assignments. The PRG strongly recommends that the Faculty clearly communicates at Faculty level the need for all module coordinators to define a specific period of time – and within three weeks is suggested as a reasonable period – during which time student work assessment and feedback would be completed and to manage work to ensure that this is (normally) achieved.

Linked to this is the workload associated with five-credit modules. The PRG found no evidence of Faculty level guidelines setting out standards on word count and percentage of marks for assessment. This emerged as an issue in the undergraduate student meetings where there were major discrepancies in assignment word count and/or percentage of marks available. There were examples of a 3000 word essay being worth five percent of a five-credit module and at the other end of the spectrum, being worth 50 percent of a five-credit module. The PRG recommends that guiding principles be devised for staff to consider the appropriateness of their assignments, its scale and scope (length/word count) and the percentage of marks being awarded. Linked to this, an overview of assignments (assignment type, length and submission date) for each programme should give the programme board an overview of how the students are being assessed, whether there is an appropriate mix of assessment and whether students are appropriately assessed.

## **5.4 Research and Scholarship**

The PRG noted a strong research ethos across the Faculty. The Faculty Committee for Research is composed of representatives from each of the seven schools under the effective leadership of the Associate Dean for Research. There are 11 research centres within the Faculty including Institute for Future Media and Journalism, Institute for Ethics, Centre for Children’s Literature and Culture, SEALBHÚ, Centre for Translation and Textual Studies, Irish Centre for Poetry Studies, Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Law Research Centre, Brexit Institute, Institute for International Conflict Resolution and the Irish India Institute. Ensuring the ongoing vitality and indeed viability of existing and emerging research groups should be part of the work of the Research Committee, albeit reporting directly to FMG.

Research in the Faculty is noteworthy. Using the criteria set by the central University research office to designate staff who are ‘research active’, the Faculty has moved from 46 percent in 2011 to 69 percent at present and state they are on course to meet a target of 80 percent, well before the 2022 deadline. A commendation of the PRG is around the effectiveness of Faculty level supports and investments put in place to support staff to become more research active. These include initiatives such as the Journal Article Support Scheme, Book Publication Support Scheme, Research Support Funding Scheme, Workshop Support Scheme and Research Fellowship. The PRG also commends the Faculty for its track record in bringing in funding. External research

income has more than doubled over the last decade to a level of €4.6m in 2018. A significant amount of this funding is through Irish language related funding within Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge (€1.1m) and EU Marie Curie and RISE funding (€1.9m). The panel acknowledge the challenges for disciplines such as Humanities and Social Sciences within the current funding landscape.

The incorporation in 2016 brought together Schools with a diverse range of research traditions into the Faculty – these included disciplines with creative practice outputs, areas with a strong multilingual dimension and, of strategic significance for the University, the largest Irish language research unit in the world. This has added to the depth and variety of the research undertaken across the Faculty and the emergence of new interdisciplinary research possibilities. It has also brought with it some challenges including integration of academic disciplines within Faculty structures and providing support mechanisms attuned to the needs and publication patterns of new disciplines. The PRG commends the Faculty workload model and recommends it continue to review its approach to research and research outputs by acknowledging the publication of monographs and curated and edited collections as part of work that might be undertaken by colleagues.

The Faculty has also greatly increased its PhD student numbers as a result of significant investment in PhD scholarships (providing four-year funding at €16,000 per annum, plus fees). PhD supervisors had good knowledge of the PGR process and recognition of its importance to the PhD process. Nonetheless, meetings with postgraduate research students elicited mixed evidence of supports within the Faculty. Overall quality of supervision was satisfactory but some aspects varied depending on supervisor and, sometimes, disciplinary norms. The supervisors that the PGR team met were strongly engaged with the supervision process and invested a lot in supporting their students. A key issue – important for the University rather than just the Faculty – emerged in these discussions with regard to supporting international postgraduate research students in particular. Complexities with regard to visa issues, access to hardship funds, accommodation and bank accounts were identified as common difficulties encountered by International Students who are not always aware of the legal issues around their study status.

The PRG commends the Faculty for some of the ways it has responded to these issues such as providing a small fund to support visa applications, more opportunities for remote supervision of international students and the accommodation of maternity and paternity leave for funded students. Whilst some aspects of student recruitment and enrolment are undertaken by the University directorates, a recommendation for the Faculty is that it considers consolidating, directing and promoting its work in this area by creating a Humanities and Social Sciences Graduate School to build a stronger identity and reputation in the area of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, to increase visibility internationally to assist in attracting high calibre PhD students and to do more to disseminate research internationally. This ties into the need, highlighted in other areas of this report, to have a communications and reputation plan where the Faculty does more to identify and put a plan in place to project its reputation both internally within the University and externally to key external stakeholders. The PRG also notes there is an opportunity for the Faculty to develop stronger research links across its current Schools. We recommend identifying avenues to enable the development of a shared research culture which would assist strategic planning linked to funding applications, PhD funding and research student training. One means of doing this might be through identifying research clusters that might be included as part of existing centres.

## **5.5 Communication and Provision of Information**

The people who work across the Faculty have achieved much since incorporation – but much of that progress has not been made widely known or celebrated and the PRG found many examples when colleagues within the Faculty and across the University, as well as external colleagues, said that they did not know about one or other aspect of the Faculty's education portfolio, research activities or potential to make a difference for them. Colleagues – both new and long standing – were not always clear on some policies and procedures regarding teaching and learning

(including matching Individual Learning Objectives to assessment), research support (including availability of research finance support) and career planning (including performance review and priority setting). There was evidence of inconsistency in the regularity and timeliness of communications to students regarding teaching, assessment and module choice. Faculty and disciplinary leadership could and should embrace a greater commitment to consistency of provision and best practice across all its Schools and disciplines. Now is the time to build more confidently for the future on the quality of the Faculty and to do more to share – within and outside the University – news of the distinctive and high quality work being undertaken by the Faculty.

### *Identity and vision*

The current shape of the Schools in the Faculty broadly continues the units that existed before incorporation. The formal processes of incorporation may have ended, but the PRG considers that there is more to achieve in managing the Faculty and its disciplines for the future. As noted above, therefore, the PGR recommends that the current School structure be interrogated with a view to meaningful revision in terms of the Faculty's strategic ambitions and disciplinary connectedness, and that the portfolios of the Associate Deans and the relevant Convenors are mobilised more meaningfully as part of the development and the evaluation of Faculty objectives and policies.

There is some evidence that the cultures in each School – including the student experience – could be enhanced with more accountable leadership within Schools, more sharing of best practice across Schools, and more opportunities to drive the cross- and multi-disciplinary opportunities that disciplines in the Faculty (and beyond) might afford.

In the SAR, and in PRG meetings, the single, top priority message that staff members repeated was focused on co-location. The staff team believes that this would make a difference: it was less clear just what that difference would be – for example, what is the teaching and learning, and the research, engagement and impact that might be enhanced or developed with colleagues and students being co-located? Therefore, the PGR recommends that, as part of the review of the current school structure, attention is paid to identifying the unique aspects of the current and future academic vision of the Faculty and using that work to capture both a future vision and plan that focuses and builds on existing areas of excellence and identifies and enhances areas of emerging and distinctive quality. This will require responsible and accountable leaders across the whole Faculty to work together more effectively and to be more active and visible beyond the Faculty within the wider University and, indeed, beyond the University in national and international HE and disciplinary-specific networks: staff of this Faculty should be encouraged to be more active in leadership roles within and outside the University and be supported to share the leading and unique values of humanities and social sciences at DCU more widely.

### *Reputation plan*

This work – of being clear and confident in the distinctive approach to work in humanities and social sciences at DCU – should underpin a reputation plan for the Faculty: it was clear from the review that aspects of the work of the Faculty are invisible or unfamiliar or misunderstood across a full range of stakeholders, including, perhaps, within the University's own professional services teams. With an ever greater demand on developing an international as well as a national reputation, ensuring that the vision and strategy are clear is crucial but so too is sharing more confidently and strategically the story of the Faculty as an essential and innovative part of the DCU project. To that end, the PGR recommends that the Faculty develop and are supported to implement a reputation plan that will address: strategic partnerships and networks – nationally and internationally; student experience, including staff-student ratio; mobilising research and learning events, including building on the new engagement initiative, to deliver more against key agendas such as employability, research and impact; and, strategic marketing and communications.

A part of this work is about capturing and communicating a clear vision for the Faculty as it is and as it will be – and addressing myths, untruths or just old news about the Faculty. Two priorities emerge here: (i) the Faculty playing a lead, flag-bearing role for, and within, the University and



being supported to do so; and, (ii) the Faculty being strategic and organised in developing and stewarding external partnerships and networks.

### *Communications plan*

The thorough preparations undertaken by the Faculty team for this review involved a wide range of stakeholders internally and externally: this may be the approach that will achieve better and more timely interventions and progress for the Faculty moving forward. There is scope now to develop and extend this approach by further engagement of colleagues in identifying and sharing best practice, horizon scanning and future planning, and championing and celebrating the achievements of other colleagues and units. There is a particular challenge around induction and training for colleagues new to the University and/or new to roles within the Faculty. Ensuring that all appropriate policies and procedures are visible and up to date is part of that, as is appropriate mentoring together with training, specifically training within the values and vision of the Faculty. Various tools will be required to achieve the most meaningful engagement and impact. The Dean, Associate Deans and Heads of Schools will need to continue to be visible and accountable and be consistent and clear as to priorities and goals. Electronic communications and social media will need to be harnessed and used consistently and clearly across a range of agendas, including marketing and reputation building. Print needs to be part of the toolkit for colleagues travelling for research and recruitment. Additionally, Schools and disciplinary groups need to be brought together regularly to respond to challenges arising, for briefing and updates, and to celebrate success and achievements.

## **5.6 External Perspectives**

### *Undergraduate Students*

The Faculty promotes the involvement of its students in quality improvement processes. Student representatives attend programme board meetings, and both the Faculty Teaching and Research Committee meetings. These structures provide a means for students to raise issues and to contribute to their resolution. They also provide an opportunity to clarify for students the reasons for certain features of their degree programme (e.g. timetabling constraints).

In meeting undergraduate students, the PRG found that there was generally a high regard for the courses offered by the Faculty. In many cases, this was what attracted students to DCU. Location, on the northside of the city, was also an attraction in some cases (an interesting comparison with UCD was made, in which the latter was referred to as being inaccessible). Students reported various frustrations with studying arts, humanities and social science subjects in DCU. In addition to generic issues associated with studying in Dublin (accommodation, cost of living, transport), the students highlighted the following.

The quality of the library facilities in the St Patrick's campus is seriously undermined by noise from the coffee shop on the ground floor and from the presence of teaching rooms adjacent to study areas. Many students reported that they prefer to travel to the Glasnevin campus to use what they consider to be the far superior library facilities there.

There is a perception that some subjects offered on the BAJH degree may not have the same standing as those subjects offered on other degrees. Students reflected on their experience – or perception – that single honours programmes were managed more effectively – and as a result the student experience more consistent -- than a joint honours programmes and that such students could be supported more effectively by Schools and Faculty.

As part of the PGR's engagement with students' problems with timely feedback were discussed. In some instances, feedback on continuous assessment items came *after* the terminal exam. This echoed opinion expressed by Faculty staff members both in the SAR and in PRG meetings, where large class sizes were cited as causing problems. Good practice does exist in areas: students spoke of the value of office hours being used to provide one-to-one feedback on assignments.

Communications are a concern in some areas. As noted above, there are formal mechanisms for student representatives to highlight concerns to staff. But representatives report that there is sometimes a failure to close the loop on issues raised, or to communicate effectively the outcomes of decisions made. This is sometimes due to a lack of understanding on the part of students of the feedback process but should also be part of the overall communications plan recommended above. Online systems do not always make important information as accessible to students as it could be. Systems are not user-friendly and do not link well with one another. The University's VLE, Loop, is unevenly used by different staff members: students would welcome an agreement by staff to use Loop to present key points of information for each module. There were concerns about the uneven weighting applied to assessment items across different modules. As noted above, an extreme case was quoted where in one instance a 3000-word essay carried five per cent of the module mark, where in another, an essay of the same length carried 50 percent of the marks.

#### *Taught postgraduate students*

The PRG met a group of taught postgraduate students who were, overall, very positive on their experience as PG students in the Faculty. The level of teaching and teaching support was commended, as was the level of pastoral support from staff. The environment was reported to be welcoming and inclusive, including for international students. The PRG noted the high numbers of DCU undergraduate students who go on to take postgraduate courses in the Faculty, due to their positive experiences as undergraduates. Support for mature students was found to be very good and flexible. Against this overall positive background, some difficulties were identified. Orientation and induction sessions can be overwhelming and do not always provide the information that students need. There is a significant step up from undergraduate to postgraduate study, and students sometimes felt underprepared. But academic staff were found to be very helpful in these situations. As with undergraduate students, the variation in the quality of the library facilities in St Patrick's Campus and in Glasnevin Campus was raised. As with the staff cohort, there is an opportunity to do more in terms of both scholarly and social activities to create a stronger sense of community among groups of students. The PRG welcome the fact that a new library will open on All Hallows campus in June 2020 giving more opportunities for students to have quiet space for study.

#### *Postgraduate Research Students*

Postgraduate research (PGR) students reported a high degree of variation in terms of the degree to which they felt part of a research group or a broad research effort. This depended on individual supervisors. Overall, supervisors were highly regarded by PGR students and the quality of supervision was commended. Inconsistencies across schools were mentioned in terms of the level of support for applications for PGR study and for financial support. Graduate research training was, by and large, found to be of good quality, but students questioned the relevance of some courses. It is found to be difficult to strike an appropriate balance between courses of direct relevance to particular Schools and disciplines and courses of more general or transferrable interest and use. The provision of information on PGR opportunities in DCU was somewhat uneven across Schools, but there was a common experience of being able to identify individuals with particular expertise as potential research supervisors.

#### *Internal stakeholders*

The SAR gave a clear account of how the Faculty interacts with various professional support units within the University. These units interact with the Faculty in different ways. For example, the Finance Office interacts nearly exclusively with the Dean and the Faculty Manager, while the Teaching Enhancement Unit interacts with individual academics, while also having a particular relationship with School Teaching Convenors and the AD for Teaching and Learning. The Faculty has made the positive step of identifying the need to corral a range of related activities by its recent appointment of an Associate Dean for External Engagement. Likewise, the allocation of an extra full FTE senior post within the Faculty administrative staff resources to Communications and Marketing is likely to be a positive move. The review visit itself indicated a number of tensions in relation to the optimal delivery of services by professional units in supporting the Faculty's mission. This will be an area for the University to consider. But it must be noted that staff based

in the Faculty need to be aware of and to understand fully the services provided by the professional support units: effective communication is a concern in some areas as well as service expectations and services levels.

### *External stakeholders*

The PRG met a number of different external stakeholders ranging from employers of the Faculty's graduates to clients of Schools, research centres and individual academics within the faculty. The dominant theme in the meeting was of the high quality of graduates and students coming from the Faculty into employment and internships/work placements. Employers referred to how DCU students and graduates compare favourably to those from other universities, being more work-ready. It was mentioned that the timing of the work placement programme in Law and Government is advantageous to DCU students: more and better opportunities are available to the students. The relationship with staff in Law and Government was commended as being a feature that made this programme work well. In addition, the work of Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge was commended as a particular highlight of the work done by the Faculty. The nature of Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge's work on a range of projects (including téarma.ie, logainm.ie) was commended. The excellence of staff involved on other projects with external stakeholders was also commended. The quality of work of DCU academics on a tender for the Department of Justice and Equality was noted as being 'streets ahead' of competitors. All external stakeholders met by the PRG expressed the desire to continue and expand their relationship with the Faculty.

### *Website*

For any academic unit, its online presence plays a hugely important role in how it presents itself to the outside world – and being clear on which web resources (sites) are targeted to external users and which resources are for internal teams is important in deploying resources and managing expectations. Nonetheless, it is highly significant that external stakeholders reported on how difficult it was to determine whether or not expertise in a specific area existed within the Faculty. Whilst research expertise and strengths are not as prominent as they could be, a number of research students indicated that they identified their research supervisor through a web-search. On the one hand, this shows that the information can be found, but on the other, it shows the importance of ensuring that this information is both clear and readily available to prospective research students and research collaborators.

### *Reputation*

On several occasions during the review visit, the PRG encountered the opinion that the overall external view of DCU as being science/engineering/entrepreneur focused was a hindrance to the Faculty. This came primarily from Faculty staff, but the opinion was also voiced by external stakeholders: DCU is not known for the arts and humanities. The review group considers that there is considerable scope to change this perception. It notes the prominence of some Faculty staff members in national media and sees opportunities in, for example, promoting a 'DCU Graduate School in [A]HSS' as a means of changing external perceptions, in promoting the Faculty's research successes and in promoting those areas where the Faculty has national, international or global leadership status (Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge being an example of the last of these). Issues of professional concern to members of the Faculty are prominent in daily discourse in Ireland, and Faculty members make a significant contribution to debating, researching and confronting these issues including questions about gender, social media, climate change and politics. Research outputs of Faculty members are (probably uniquely within DCU) featured in the mainstream media through book reviews and TV/radio interviews.

With incorporation and the expansion of the Faculty, both in terms of staff and student numbers and in terms of its research output, it is clear that the 'centre of gravity' of DCU has shifted away from the sciences towards a more balanced shape encompassing the humanities. There is perhaps an inevitable lag in external perceptions. A renewed relationship with the Communications office, and optimisation of the service provided by that office, may ensure that the Faculty's standing in the arts, humanities and social sciences is properly promoted by the University. The PRG recommends developing a Reputation Plan to clearly articulate who and what the Faculty is (its identity, in other words) to internal and external stakeholders. As a key part of this exercise, the PRG recommends that the Faculty pay particular attention to its website

(and overall online presence), with a design that allows for easy access for external stakeholders to information on (amongst other things) the range of expertise held by individuals and groups in the Faculty

Incorporation has had a major impact on the Faculty – and the process of Incorporation is perceived to be incomplete in several quarters. Both the perception and reality of this may also be a hindrance to the development of the reputation of the Faculty both within DCU and beyond: new and natural disciplinary and thematic synergies have had limited opportunity to develop in the current post-incorporation structures.

## 6 SWOT Analysis and Plans for Improvement

### 6.1 SWOT Analysis for Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The self-assessment report for the area included a proposed summary SWOT analysis of the Area. As a result of the Peer Review Group's analysis of the self-assessment report and findings from the peer review visit, we propose the following to be a true reflection of the Areas capabilities and opportunities, and identified weaknesses and threats to future success.

**Table 4: SWOC for Faculty**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Student experience:</b> Positive student experience on taught postgraduate programmes</li> <li>● <b>Research capacity:</b> Development and growth of research capacity across the Faculty supported by Faculty funding and external research awards</li> <li>● Strong and distinctive <b>Postgraduate research capacity</b></li> <li>● <b>Positive calibre</b> of academic and administrative staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>FHSS identity:</b> Lack of a shared or common FHSS vision and identity internally and externally</li> <li>● <b>Student experience:</b> Less positive student experience on some subjects in undergraduate programmes not belonging to an individual school (e.g. BA Joint Hons)</li> <li>● <b>High staff-student ratio</b> in undergraduate classes</li> <li>● Some challenges around <b>course organisation</b> – timetabling, communications, assessment/feedback</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Development of new programmes</b> in new emerging areas that draw on cross Faculty expertise</li> <li>● Utilising <b>curriculum review</b> to review the BA Joint Hons programme and set up as programme to unite the Faculty and as a distinguishing feature of the FHSS when competing for students from other Universities.</li> <li>● <b>Internationalisation</b> of programme offerings</li> <li>● <b>Roll out of Student Information System</b></li> <li>● Greater <b>external engagement</b> linked to reputation plan for research, teaching and societal issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Lack of visibility</b> and influence within the University and HE sector more widely</li> <li>● Plans for <b>co-location</b> not developed</li> <li>● Highly <b>competitive student market</b> particularly closeness to new TU Dublin campus</li> <li>● Lack of progress beyond <b>incorporation</b> and further consolidation of structures not being reviewed and refreshed</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Plans for Improvement Identified by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

In the SAR, the Faculty identified 11 areas for improvement:

1. Co-location of the Faculty in suitable facilities on a single campus, at the earliest feasible opportunity.
2. Improvement of the physical appearance of the Henry Grattan Building in particular.
3. Improvement in staff-student ratios as resources allow.
4. An increased focus on securing the necessary resources for improved staffing.
5. An improved focus on student recruitment activity aimed in particular at: (a) Students transferring from the Further Education sector. (b). Taught postgraduate students. (c) International students – both EU and non-EU.
6. Increasing the effectiveness of student feedback in the learning process.
7. Increasing the provision of small-group teaching as resources allow.
8. Rolling out INTRA work placements on all programmes.
9. Increasing the number of students who avail of our excellent year abroad programmes.
10. Increasing the number of high-quality research publications.
11. Increasing the impact of research – both in citation metrics and in policy and knowledge transfer

The PRG recommendations align with a number of the key areas identified in the SAR, particularly around the student experience – including in respect of staff student ratios, student recruitment, student assessment/feedback and research. The Faculty's priority of co-location is acknowledged by the PRG. As stated earlier in the report, the multi-sited nature of the Faculty was presented to the PRG as the preeminent challenge to 'effective activities and processes' for the Faculty. However, at this time the PRG believes the immediate and pressing priority for the Faculty is the development of a clear Faculty vision and culture together with a coherent reputation plan. Without this, co-location in itself will not deliver on any of the priorities espoused in the document.

## 7 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

The PRG commends the Faculty on both their commitment to teaching and research given the challenges presented by both incorporation and funding constraints. The following recommendations are being made in the spirit of supporting the Faculty to further develop their reputation in terms of teaching and research excellence.

The main recommendations being proposed centre on the following key issues:

- develop a clear Faculty vision and drive forward the culture change necessary to deliver on it;
- develop a reputation plan that promotes the reach and significance of the Faculty as it is now and as it will be moving forward;
- improve key business systems and structures and modernise engagements with professional services outside the Faculty;
- address the important issues identified in this report that are impacting negatively on the student experience; and,
- develop an enhanced suite of relevant policies for the effective operation and development of the Faculty and its people, especially in the areas of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

In all this, careful attention should be paid to communications and the development of a meaningful and sustained communications plan for the Faculty overall.

### Indication of Priority:

- P1: A recommendation that is important and requires urgent action.  
 P2: A recommendation that is important, but can, or perhaps must, be addressed on a more extended time scale.  
 P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities.

### Level(s) of the University where action is required:

- A: Area under review  
 U: University Senior Management

**Table 5: Summary of Commendations**

Commendations	
1	Shared commitment to the SAR process.
2	Strong academic culture of the unit.
3	Principled and effective leadership.
4	Use of evidence in decision making.
5	Potential of Faculty committees to develop, deliver and monitor effective management of resources.
6	Wide and diverse range of programmes.
7	Quality teaching delivery, achieving high student satisfaction and engagement.
8	Strong employability outcomes of Faculty graduates.
9	A discernible research ethos across the Faculty.
10	Strong commitment to research support and investment in PhD scholarships.
11	Programmes and aspects of its research are held in high regard by a range of stakeholders, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students (both taught and research), employers and 'end-users'.

**Table 6: Summary of Recommendations**

Recommendation	P	Level	
1	P1	A	Develop a clear Faculty vision that articulates and develops the values and culture of the new Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences post incorporation.
2	P1	A	Review the current School structure and consider adapting it to optimise the expansion of the Faculty at incorporation and its current and future strategic ambitions.
3	P1	A/U	Develop and implement, with University support, a reputation plan that highlights key agendas such as employability, research and impact, and strategic marketing and communications and promote both within and outside the Faculty. This should include; (i) a coherent communications plan; and, (ii) a review of Faculty websites and other social media.
4	P1	A/U	Develop a clear Faculty strategy to improve virtual and physical connectivity between the three sites.
5	P2	A/U	Review the high-level interaction between Faculty leadership and leaders in HR, Estates, External Affairs and the Finance Office to ensure that it is regular and more fully accountable.
6	P2	A	Develop a staffing and resource investment plan within future strategy and establish a more strategic role in allocation of budget to constituent units.
7	P2	A/U	Develop a clear and intelligence-led process through which the Faculty and the University can assess how sustainable activities and market-attuned programmes are (i) developed and enhanced, and withdrawn and closed and (ii) mobilise professional service resources in a consistent manner.
8	P1	A	Review all undergraduate programmes with particular focus on delivering BA Joint Honours programme which more clearly links to the Faculty's identity and the values of DCU.
9	P1	A	Develop Faculty-level guiding principles for assessment – to reflect more consistently the scale, scope and percentage of marks being allocated and to achieve more timely feedback on assignments.
10	P3	A	Maintain a coordinated Faculty-wide approach to INTRA so as to ensure that there are opportunities for work placements across all programmes
11	P1	A/U	Monitor closely the new Student Information System in terms of effectiveness and its integration with other University systems.
12	P1	A	Develop mechanisms within the Faculty to foster stronger research links across its current Schools – for example via consideration of the development and promotion of key thematic areas, that cut across several disciplines or Schools, where the Faculty is excellent and/or distinctive.



13	P2	A/U	Consider the viability of creating a Humanities and Social Sciences Graduate School to assist in attracting high calibre PhD students and to increase visibility of doctoral provision nationally and internationally.
14	P2	A	Develop clearer policies and procedures in learning and teaching, research and impact, and recruitment, retention and career development to deal with issues which require increasing attention, including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Sustainability.
15	P2	A/U	Provide appropriate resourcing of training at a Faculty cohort level – with a particular focus on building a sense of community amongst personnel in the Faculty.

## Appendices

### **Timetable Peer Review Group Visit** **Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences** **3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> December**

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Meeting No.	Room No.
<b>Day 0- Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019</b>				
18.00 – 18.30	Briefing by Director, QPO to the Peer Review Group (PRG); guidelines provided to assist the PRG during the visit and in developing its report	Crowne Plaza Hotel		Meeting Room 1
18.30 – 19.00	PRG Private Meeting Time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PRG Selects a Chair</li> <li>● PRG discusses key themes, areas for exploration based on the SAR &amp; PRG assigns tasks and responsibilities amongst members</li> </ul>	Crowne Plaza Hotel		Meeting Room 1
19.00 – 21.00	Peer Review Group Dinner	Crowne Plaza Hotel		Restaurant
<b>Day 1- Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December - Based on Glasnevin Campus</b>				
0915-1015	Consideration of the SAR with the Dean and Faculty Management Board. <i>Will begin with a short presentation by the Dean, followed by discussion (Director, QPO to attend)</i>	Base Room	1	GLA.CG35
1015-1030	PRG Private Meeting Time	Base Room		GLA.CG35
1030-1130	Faculty Teaching & Learning Committee	1 Room	2	GLA.CG35

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Meeting No.	Room No.
<b>Day 1- Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December - Based on Glasnevin Campus</b>				
1130-1230	<b>Parallel Session 1</b> Programme Chairs – Undergraduate (UG)	<b>Parallel Session 2</b> Programme Chairs – Postgraduate (PGT)	2 Rooms	3a/3b GLA.CG35 GLA.CG06
1230-1300	Campus Tour – Glasnevin Campus			

1300-1400	Peer Review Group Lunch		Base Room		GLA.CG35
1400-1445	<b>Parallel Session 1</b> Meeting with Students (UG)	<b>Parallel Session 2</b> Meeting with Students (PGT)	2 Rooms	4a/4b	GLA.CG35 GLA.CG06
1445-1515	PRG private discussion time/ Coffee				GLA.CG35
1515-1600	Meeting of academic staff involved in teaching		Base Room	5	GLA.CG35
1600-1700	Meeting with external engagement stakeholders		Base Room	6	GLA.CG35
1700-1730	PRG private discussion time		Base Room		GLA.CG35
1800-1930	PRG Private Dinner and discussion		Gourmet Food Parlour	QPO	

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Meeting No.	Room No.	
<b>Day 2- Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December - Based on All Hallows Campus AM</b>					
0915-1000	Faculty Research Committee		Base Room	7	AHC.S228
1000-1100	<b>Parallel Session 1</b> Aca Staff- Focus on publication	<b>Parallel Session 2</b> Academic Staff: focus on research funded projects, e.g. FuJo, VoxPol	1 Room	8a/8b	AHC.S228 AHC.S128
1100-1130	PRG Private Meeting Time		Base Room		AHC.S228
1130-1230	<b>Parallel Session 1</b> Aca Staff- Focus on PhD Supervision	<b>Parallel Session 2</b> PhD students	3 Reps from each School 2 Rooms	9a/9b	AHC.S128 AHC.S228
1230-1300	Campus Tour – All Hallows and St Patrick’s campuses				

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Meeting No.	Room No.
<b>Day 2- Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December - Based on St Patrick’s Campus PM</b>				
1300-1400	Lunch/ PRG Private Meeting Time	Base Room		SPD.C206 SPD.C207

1400-1445	Relevant Central Support Units (ISS, Library, SS&D, Estates, Finance, HR, OCOO etc.) and service teaching e.g. DCUBS, IoE	Base Room	10	SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1445-1515	Faculty Administration	Base Room	11	SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1515-1545	Staff Open Forum for any member of Area staff	Base Room	12	SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1545-1615	PRG Private Meeting Time/ Coffee	Base Room		SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1615-1700	Meeting with Faculty Management Board	Base Room	13	SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1700-1745	Meeting with Faculty Executive Dean	Base Room	14	SPD.C206 SPD.C207
1830-2000	PRG Private Dinner and Meeting	Crowne Plaza Hotel		

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Meeting No.	Room No.
<b>Day 3- Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December - Based on Glasnevin Campus</b>				
0900-0955	PRG Meeting with SMG	1 Room	15	AG01
1000-1025	Meeting with Area reporting head (relevant member of SMG)	1 Room	16	AG01
1030-1300	PRG Private Meeting Time- final discussion on recommendations	Base Room		GLA.CG35
1300-1345	PRG working lunch and finalization of exit presentation	Base Room		GLA.CG35
1345-1400	Briefing with Area Head / Dean and Director of QPO on key recommendations	Base Room	17	GLA.CG35
1400-1430	PRG Exit Presentation - -All FHSS Staff	1 Room	18	GLA.CG86