



Academic Unit Review

**School of Health Science, Wellbeing and
Society**

13th March 2023

Introduction to Academic Unit Review

ATU's Quality Assurance Framework requires a review of each academic unit prior to the programmatic review of programmes within that unit. The review of academic units focuses on the performance of the academic unit since the last review and involves an environmental review and a self-evaluation identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the unit and plans to deal with the opportunities and challenges facing it. The findings from the review of academic units, will feed into the programmatic review process. The nature of this review was unusual in that the School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society is newly formed following a restructure within the Mayo Campus with some programmes and staff being attached to other Schools, and a newly formed department located on the Mayo Campus becoming part of the School of Business. As such the review by necessity cut across the Mayo Campus and the newly formed School. The programmes in the School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society will be going through Programmatic Review shortly.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the review process are outlined below. The review process considered the following:

- Organisation and management of the Academic Unit: Resources, roles and reporting structures shall be evaluated to determine whether they are fit for purpose, viable and support the activities and role of the Academic Unit. Standard operating procedures shall be reviewed and evaluated with any gaps identified and addressed. Staff development shall also be evaluated and the importance of quality, quality assurance and enhancement in the Academic Unit culture shall be evaluated.
- Academic Units and services supporting internal and external stakeholders: Each Academic Unit will describe the aims and objectives of the Academic Unit and determine and detail the user experience of the Academic Unit, both internal and external.
- Programmes: Each Academic Units programme portfolio will be considered, in addition to issues surrounding programme development, programme design, programme management (to include programme retirement) and programme information.
- Student Lifecycle: The role of the Academic Unit will be considered in relation to the management of the student throughout the student lifecycle including transition in and out, and student engagement and retention.
- Evidence based decision making: The decision-making process utilised by the Academic Unit shall be evaluated, information gathered and stored shall be reviewed, the information used to make decisions shall be identified and the quality and source of information shall be reviewed.
- University wide engagement: The Academic Unit's contribution to the University's function shall be reviewed to include items such as participation in ATU committees, reviews etc. Each Academic Unit shall also detail how it engages with relevant external agencies and its contribution to external bodies.
- Integration of all Academic Unit users: Each Academic Unit shall review how it works with centralised functions e.g. Lifelong Learning, Research Office etc.
- Communication and information systems: Internal communication systems within each Academic Unit and between the Academic Unit and other academic units, departments, management structures and other Functional Unit's shall be reviewed. Information management systems and communication tools shall be reviewed to determine whether they are fit for purpose. Each Academic Unit shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant data.
- Quality assurance: Compliance with ATU's Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and university policies shall be determined.
- Strategic plan for the Academic Unit: Each Academic Unit shall develop and detail their strategic plan and evaluate its alignment with the GMIT/ATU Strategic Plan 2018-2023 and its implementation targets.

Overview of the School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society

The School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society was established on September 1st, 2021, following a decision by Governing Body in December 2020 to identify the Mayo campus as a campus with a strategic focus on the health sciences, while retaining a commitment to the region with other programme offerings.

This is the first time an academic school has been located on the Mayo Campus. Prior to December 2020 the Mayo Campus comprised of two academic departments namely, the Department of Nursing, Health Sciences and Social Care and the Department of Business, Humanities and Technology. The School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society was formed following dissolution of both departments, and a reorganisation of the structures therein; the school now comprises of the Department of Nursing, Health Sciences and Integrated Care & the Department of Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences. The Department of Organisational Development resides on the Mayo campus but is managed through the School of Business.

There has been a strong commitment to postgraduate programme development in the last five years. The first master's programme: a Master of Science Quality and Safety in Health Care/Social care commenced in January 2017 and a number of masters programmes have been developed year on year.

Review Process

The strategic review process is loosely based on the legacy GMIT Policy Strategic Review of Academic Units (version 1 2018). However, it was not possible nor was it appropriate to strictly follow the linear approach outlined within the policy document. The School sought support from the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs to undertake an academic unit review and programmatic review concurrently rather than the traditional linear approach. It was clarified that the Academic Unit review will reflect the Mayo campus for the years of 2013-2018 however the programmatic review will reflect the programmes within each department, i.e., each department within the School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society which was formed on September 1st 2021. The report was compiled by Head of School and the Head of Department of Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences and the Head of Department of Nursing Health Science and Integrated Care. It was recognised that given the diverse nature of the School it will take more time than this process allowed to fully engage and consult with all relevant stakeholders. However, an interdisciplinary consultation session was held in February 2022. It was recognised in undertaking the review that the context has changed entirely with the formation to Atlantic Technological University.

The Self-Evaluation Report was submitted to a Peer Review Panel who held an online meeting on Monday 13 March 2023.

The panel members were:

- **Dr Joe McGarry**, Educational Consultant (Chair)
- **Dr Ciarán Reilly**, Assistant Lecturer & Assistant Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses & Estates, Maynooth University
- **Dr Margaret Murphy**, Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs & Lecturer in Medieval History, Carlow College
- **Ms Sara Kennedy**, Head of Department of Nursing & Healthcare, SETU
- **Ms Clare O'Dowd** Director of Operations, Western Care Association
- **Mr Fran Power**, Civil Defence Officer, Mayo County Council (Graduate)
- **Ms Ashling Sheehan Boyle**, Assistant Lecturer/Programme Lead of BA Early Childhood Care and Education TUS
- **Dr Alan Ringland**, Lecturer in Sport & Exercise Psychology and Physical Education, MTU
- **Ms Carmel Brennan** Assistant Registrar, ATU (Secretary)

The agenda for the panel meeting is outlined in Appendix A.

The panel met with the following individuals/groups: agenda

- School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society Leadership Team
- School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society Students
- School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society Programme Chairs and Year Leads

Further details of the staff and students who met with the review panel are available in Appendices B and C.

Findings of the External Peer Panel

The panel firstly met with the President and Head of College & Registrar. The President outlined the evolution of the Mayo Campus, the formation of the university and the challenges facing the newly formed School trying to carve out a strategic direction in an environment where the university is itself formulating its strategy. The work of staff in developing new programmes and making changes in a challenging environment was recognised. The Head of College & Registrar informed the panel that this review process is part of the legacy closing out of the Academic Unit Review cycle as it was delayed due to covid. Given the early stage of development of the School the review provided an opportunity to look forward rather than back. The findings of this review may also feed into the Cinnte Review of the University which will take place next year.

The panel were made aware of the level of change that the Mayo Campus had undergone and that the recent establishment of the School meant that it was difficult to have an integrated strategy, particularly in light of the newly formed University which is developing its own strategy and faculty structure. While the documentation presented was difficult to read in places given the delayed review of the academic unit, its newly formed status and the references to the legacy campus entity, the challenges of representing the historical aspect of the review were recognised and the presentation by the Head of School was helpful in clarifying some matters.

The panel then met the School Executive team. A short presentation from the Head of School outlined the nature of the review, the structure of the school, the thematic areas which form the basis for the School's programmes, and other key topics such as teaching & learning, research & scholarship, and internal & external engagement. It acknowledged that the formation of a School should remove silos resulting in greater interdisciplinarity and the promotion of scholarship and research. A deliberate decision was taken to not develop a strategy at this point given the absence of a university strategy or structure. The future orientation of the School includes examining disciplinary alignment across ATU, exploring opportunities for communities of practice and new student recruitment. The immediate capital priorities relating to student accommodation and sports facilities to meet student and community needs were outlined.

In response to questions from the panel opportunities for interconnectedness between the departments were outlined. These included programmes sharing content, cross teaching between departments, staff development and non-academic synergies such as Green Campus and the Social Club. Cross disciplinary modules are limited in some instances due to the requirements of professional bodies.

While there is a suite of postgraduate programmes within the School, there are no metrics used in relation to targeting or measuring throughput of publications or research. An applied approach is taken to developing postgraduate programmes with employers influencing both the type and content of programmes offered. The School is moving towards the development of structured masters to boost research activity. It was acknowledged that research still very much occurs in silos and that there is room to exploit cross and inter disciplinary research. The field of Environmental Humanities is viewed as an opportunity for future research.

Continuous Professional Development is supported in the School and the types of activity being undertaken by staff were outlined including completion of doctorates and upskilling in teaching and learning.

The scale of the campus and staff approachability were considered to be very positive factors that appealed to potential and current students. The small campus means more individual attention, a feeling of community for students and higher retention. The region and its beautiful, natural environment and the outdoor pursuits it lends itself to were also deemed benefits of the campus. Public transport however can be an issue for commuting students and in particular for work placements.

The importance of making the School and campus viable was emphasised. There is a need to grow in the CAO space as it is more stable than the postgraduate and CPD market. The School has recently validated a new undergraduate programme in psychology which will be the first new CAO offering in some time. It was recognised that Castlebar is for many students not as attractive as city locations. As a result, there is a need to work with the marketing team to identify potential areas for growth. The enlarged marketing team will be helpful in this regard and new media are being explored.

The potential benefit of online programmes in widening the target market was explored. There is a feeling that online is effective for shorter programmes, with feedback from students preferring a blended approach for longer programmes allowing as it does for social engagement and networking. A consortium based approach is viewed as the most viable approach for development and delivery of new postgraduate programmes in the nursing discipline.

The low base of research was acknowledged as was the need to create a strategy that supports applied research and research supporting the region. It was accepted that there is a need to enhance scholarship through increasing master and PhD student numbers.

Many staff have engaged with teaching and learning resources and studies. It is hoped that the NTUTTR programme will offer opportunities to critically analyse and improve approaches to teaching and assessment.

Whilst there is considerable external engagement it was accepted that this needed to happen on a systematic and continuous basis.

As the university continues to develop it is important that the School inputs into its strategic direction.

The panel met a number of students who openly and enthusiastically represented their own views and in some instances those of their classmates. The students commented very positively on the support of lecturers and the intimate nature of a small campus. The particular challenges of the pandemic were acknowledged and its ongoing impact on some students. The community feel of the campus was not as strong for nursing students given the demands of their class timetable and placements. There were mixed views on how well the students were integrated into the wider community, with some feeling that there was little or no integration and others giving examples of project work done with local schools.

Potential Teaching and learning improvements were outlined for specific cohorts including preparation in advance of going on placement in semester 1 and receiving module descriptors for the entire academic year in advance of commencing placement. There was variation in how well lecturers used Moodle, but staff were generally responsive when requested to put resources on the LMS. Enhanced support around assessment types and a stricter adherence to the assessment schedule would be helpful. Some of the students were facing examinations for the first time since Junior Certificate and were feeling daunted. Groupwork are a feature of programmes and while spaces for undertaking groupwork have improved, they could be better.

Students are represented on Programme Boards and are listened to there and more informally. However, there is not always follow through on the issues raised and students were not clear on the reasons for this.

In some instances, the timetable had one or two classes on a day which was viewed as frustrating by students given time and cost involved in commuting. A grim picture was portrayed in relation to the availability, cost, and quality of student accommodation.

The panel met with a group of programme chairs and year leads with whom they discussed a wide range of topics.

There is support for teaching and learning at a local level. For example, there are two digital champions on campus who support colleagues. This was particularly helpful during Covid. Other staff upskill on an ad hoc basis as the need arises accessing resources from the Teaching & Learning Office. Challenges in remunerating or acknowledging the input of guest lecturers was outlined.

There have been particular challenges with timetabling this year. Timetabling is challenging given the level of shared modules, but this is necessary for viability and desirable due to the benefits of cross disciplinary groups. One of the issues that arose this year was the new timetable not being familiar with the constraints related to particular classes. The number of timetable issues this year were particularly stressful for staff and students, and needs to be improved.

All first-year students are taught about academic integrity of year 1 and are made familiar with the plagiarism policy and the plagiarism detection software. Students can book sessions with the Academic Writing Centre. One lecturer expressed concern about back-up in the event of an issue arising during an assessment.

It was acknowledged that the programmes in the School were not always the students' first choice but that when they commenced studies they enjoy the benefits of small classes and the community spirit on campus. Small cohorts allow activities such as field trips that might not otherwise be feasible and allow for enhanced monitoring and support of students. Staff acknowledged the impact the pandemic has had on students.

When questioned on community engagement a number of examples were provided for different disciplines including the outdoor Family Days organised by the Early Childhood Education and Care programme. External linkages included placement, committees/boards, project work, programme design, and assessment.

Programme design allows for varied assessments. It was acknowledged that these can be clustered at the end of semesters, but students are given good notice of these so they can commence working early at their own pace. A few techniques were outlined to ensure individual marking for group assessments. Students are given an opportunity to provide feedback on each module/programme stage.

The role of the Programme Chair was outlined. The Chair is a point of contact for students with issues. If the issue relates to a specific module, they are encouraged to go to the module lecturer in the first instance. It was felt that a lot of the work of the Programme Chair is unseen and that an uneven hours allowance for Chairs is unfair. It was felt that the role should be academic stewardship and not the current administration role. It was also felt that the role of Programme Chair should rotate.

Becoming involved in research was viewed as challenging given the lecturing workload of staff. It was not always obvious or easy to buy out hours even if research funding was available. There needs to be further clarity on this if the motivation and conversations on research are to materialise. The benefits of integrating research and teaching were acknowledged.

International exchanges were viewed as very valuable. Examples of internationalisation such as the developing linkage between the Early Childhood Education and Care Programme and Niagara College in Canada, visiting Fulbright Scholars and the international project in the Applied Social Care Programme were outlined.

When questioned on a QA culture some examples were given, but overall staff did not evidence a strong understanding of this topic.

There was strong substantiation of a focus on employability and supporting students in this regard. This was through programme design, placements, employability supports within programmes and the option for students to undertake The Next Step module.

Commendations

1. The extent and type of engagement with the wider community, the involvement of students in this engagement, and the benefit of this activity for the School.
2. The use of cross-modular assessments in specific programmes allows students make connections between modules and helps avoid over assessment.
3. Small groups evidently provide students with a positive student experience and allow for more individual attention for students. The small campus also allows better staff integration and cross fertilisation of ideas.
4. Support for staff undertaking doctoral studies through the thesis write-up scheme.

Conditions

1. Ensure that all staff are familiar with the location and content of all policies contained in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework. QA workshops should be provided for all staff and QA and teaching and learning should be a standing item on the agendas for Programme Boards.

Recommendations

1. The panel were concerned about the student recruitment levels given its importance to the sustainability of the campus. A specific marketing plan should be developed to promote student recruitment with particular reference to CAO programmes. Given the seriousness of the issue the campaign should be creative, targeted and actively supported by all staff. The potential for international recruitment should be explored.
2. The panel were impressed with the enthusiasm of students that engaged with them, and suggest that the School consider utilising alumni ambassadors to communicate the positive student experience available to students studying on the Mayo campus.
3. The School needs to develop an achievable research strategy with targets, having regard to current research activity by staff. The strategy should include cross disciplinary research within the School and across ATU. The School should consider the mechanisms it can utilise to support staff engaging in this activity including identifying and applying for sources of funding and clarifying processes for teaching buy out. Liaison with the Research Office would be useful in this regard.
4. Initiate a plan for staff development considering staff interests, the direction of the discipline and School, and resourcing available.
5. Whilst students were clear that their feedback was listened to, it wasn't always actioned, and students were not clear on the reasons for this. Devise a methodology to close the feedback loop.
6. Ensure that students are adequately prepared for each assessment type they are going to undertake e.g., provided with training on exam techniques, given guidelines on referencing. Student handbooks would be useful in this regard.
7. Ensure that all students receive module descriptors at the start of the academic year even those spending the first semester on placement.
8. Management and the Timetabling Office should work proactively to ensure accurate timetabling information is available to students and staff. Timetabling constraints should be clearly communicated by the Department Managers to the timetabling office.
9. The School should conduct a review to ensure resources to support academic scholarship, community engagement and department administration are adequate.
10. The School should consider the development and exploitation of the 'Live Well' philosophy espoused during the meeting with staff. The School should explore the potential of 'Green Routes' for staff, student and community wellbeing.

11. The University Management should consider what measures can be taken to alleviate the transport and accommodation pressures being faced by students in Castlebar. This may involve working with the County Council and local representatives to ensure that the infrastructure necessary to support the university in Mayo is available given the importance of the campus to the local economy and to regional development. Improvements in local transport could be a simple initiative to improve student numbers on the campus.

Appendix A

Agenda for Panel Meeting

Monday 13th March 2023

TIME	SESSION	
9am to 9.45am	Private Panel Meeting	
9.45am to 10.15am	Meeting with President and Head of College & Registrar	
10.15am to 10.30am	Break	
10.30am to 11.45am	Meeting with School Leadership Team: Head of School and Heads of Department	Focus: Short Presentation (Setting the Scene) Structure Staffing and Staff Development Facilities Programme Development School Strategy position (recognising difference)
11.45 am to 12 noon	Break	
12 noon to 1pm	Meeting with 3 rd 4 th and Postgraduate Students	Focus: Student experience Facilities Teaching and Learning Assessment
1pm to 2pm	Lunch	
2pm to 3.45pm	Meeting with Programme Chairs and/or with an additional programme representatives/year leads	Focus: Teaching and Learning Community Engagement Programme Design Programme Management Research International Quality Assurance Employability

3.45pm to 4pm	Break
4 to 4.45pm	Private Panel Meeting
4.45pm	Close-out meeting with President, Head of College and School Management
Please note agenda is subject to change at discretion of the Chair	

Appendix B

School Management Team

Staff Name	Department	Position
Dr Justin Kerr	School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society	Head of School
Dr Christina Larkin	Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Head of Department
Dr Deirdre Garvey	Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Head of Department

Programme Chairs

Staff Name	Department	Position
Caroline Kavanagh	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair BSc (Hons) In General Nursing
Agnes Tully Clarke	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair BSc (Hons) in Psychiatric Nursing
Joanne Doherty	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education & Care
Dr Maggie Wood	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair BSc (Hons) in Nursing (Add on)
Dr Carmel Heaney	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair MSc in Quality & Safety
Dr Maura Fitzsimons	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair MSc in Palliative & End of Life Care
Louise Kilbane	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair Diploma in School Aged Childcare
Clodagh Geraghty	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care	Programme Chair MSc in Applied Leadership & Management
Richard Holmes	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care Dept	Programme Chair Digital Healthcare

Mark Johnston	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care Dept	Lecturer – Mental Health Nursing, Year Lead Mental Health
Yvonne Conway	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care Dept	Lecturer – General Nursing, Year Lead General
Ann Maher	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care Dept	Lecturer – General Nursing, Year Lead General
John Gately	Dept Nursing, Health Science & Integrated Care Dept	Lecturer – General Nursing
Emer Crean	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair Certificate in Digital Mapping & GIS
Dr Fiona White	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair BA (Hons) in History & Geography
Dr Mark Garavan	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair BA (Hons) in Applied Social Care
Kevin O’ Callaghan	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education
Orla Prendergast	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair BA in Outdoor Education
John Molloy	Dept Environmental Humanities & Social Sciences	Programme Chair BA in Contemporary Art Practices

Appendix C

School of Health Science, Wellbeing and Society Students Who Met with External Peer Panel

Student Name	Programme	Stage
ALISON SHERLOCK	BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education	Year 4
PATRYK STEPIEN	BA (Hons) in History & Geography	Year 4
CORMAC DULAKE	BA in History & Geography	Year 3
JORDAN CASEY	BSc (Hons) in General Nursing	Year 3
KAREN COLLERAN	BSc (Hons) in Psychiatric Nursing	Year 4
ANGELA DORAN	BSc (Hons) in General Nursing	Year 4
CAOIMHE WARD	ATU Mayo Student Union VP	Graduate of Outdoor Education

