



Peer Review Report

Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Centre

June 2023

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Introduction

Quality at MIC

MIC's quality review process, as applied to both academic departments and professional services, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy college quality policy and meet legislative QA (Quality Assurance) requirements.

MIC complies with the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), which places a legal responsibility on the provider and linked provider to establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services. (Part 3, Section 28).

These QA procedures must take due account of relevant quality guidelines issued by [Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(QQI\)](#) and/or predecessor organisations. QQI is the statutory body responsible for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of QA procedures adopted and implemented by higher and further educational institutions within Ireland.

The periodic quality review of functional areas (academic and professional service) within the College represents a cornerstone institutional QA/QI mechanism.

MIC's Quality Review Process

The purpose of the quality review process is:

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

Overview of the Quality Review Process for Professional Services

The quality review process for MIC Professional Services consists of three phases:

- Self-Assessment
- Peer Review
- Quality Improvement

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is the first phase of the quality review process and takes approximately 6 months. It culminates in an analytical, evidence-based, Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which is written by the relevant professional service.

Peer Review

In the Peer Review phase, the members of the Peer Review Group (PRG) read the Self-Assessment Report and either spend a number of days in the college or conduct the review remotely. The review group completes a Peer Review Report (PRR) on its findings that comprises both commendations and recommendations.

Quality Improvement

The Quality Improvement phase comprises the following stages:

- Consideration of recommendations by the professional service and formulation of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP);
- Identification of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) action items necessary to implement the recommendations;
- Ongoing implementation of recommendations;
- Interim progress report to Quality Committee.

LEAD

The [Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Centre](#) (LEAD) provides leadership in academic practice and development to ensure the highest quality of student learning in support of the MIC Strategic Plan.

Mission

LEAD aims to:

- Develop a strong and integrated framework for supporting best academic practice.
- Work in partnership with staff to identify and implement personalised professional development pathways underpinned by the National PD framework.
- Be at the forefront of research on teaching, learning assessment and technology in higher education.
- Exemplify evidence-based practice by collaborating with staff in the scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Key Functions

LEAD combines technical (through its Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) team) and academic (through its academic practice division) expertise.

Peer Review Group Observations

We were impressed with the enthusiasm of all members of LEAD throughout the Peer Review Process. The self-assessment report was a thorough, honest and useful document, which enabled us to gain valuable insight into the department before our visit, and to prepare our meetings effectively.

Everyone with whom we met was open with us about the opportunities and challenges that LEAD faces in delivering its key support function at Mary Immaculate College. All our requests for information before and during our visit were met quickly and efficiently. LEAD staff in particular are to be commended on their openness and their willingness to engage in conversation and probing around their core business.

All the stakeholders we met gave us valuable insight into LEAD's offerings, and were invaluable in helping us to frame the recommendations in this report about how to prioritise among the many things that LEAD does, and to focus on the key offering 'to support staff to support student learning'.

Organisation, Management & Staffing

Commendations

1.1.1	LEAD is very well-regarded as a supportive service for staff. They enable staff to support student learning in a 'safe space' and are seen as 'changemakers' and 'problem-solvers' by those academic staff who engage with them.
1.1.2	The support provided to academic staff in programme development and re-development is excellent, when sufficient lead-in time and sustained meaningful engagement with LEAD is factored into the process by course teams.
1.1.3	Despite changes in staffing and difficulty recruiting and retaining staff in roles in the current structure, LEAD provide key support in multiple areas: Professional Development for teaching, learning and digital practice; qualification recognising teaching expertise (GCAP); Moodle use and issues; course development and redevelopment; horizon-scanning; policy development; committee and university service tasks; scholarship of teaching and learning, and research; profile-raising of LEAD and Mary Immaculate College (MIC).
1.1.4	Academic staff who have engaged with the LEAD support outlined above are impressive institutional champions for learning, teaching and digital practice.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
1.2.1	<p>LEAD should rationalise its structure to enable a focus on the key offering 'to support staff to support student learning', with each member of staff being focused on how they achieve that, in their role, at their level, and reducing duplication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior staff, i.e., Director and TEL Manager, should focus on strategic elements, e.g., horizon-scanning, policy development, profile-raising; - Academic Developers and Digital Learning Designers (NB new suggested job title) should work together to support Faculties and academic staff with programme design and re-design and the Professional Development programme; - The GCAP course should draw on the Professional Development programme and be a cross-LEAD staffed and delivered programme. All should present and publish on this. - When Faculty support, GCAP and Professional Development Programme are delivered as outlined, queries about Learning and Teaching related to Moodle should be reduced. Other Moodle issues should be addressed elsewhere (see below); - Service tasks, such as committee attendance, should be shared out between 	<p>It is unsustainable to have a unit attempting to 'be all things to all people'. LEAD must focus on the key offering which is 'to support staff to support student learning', which is best achieved through course design and re-design, and the Professional Development (PD) Programme, including the GCAP course, which needs to be closely aligned to the PD programme and re-design activities.</p> <p>In addition, the members of the LEAD team need to work together to achieve this, using the complementary expertise of Academic Developers and Digital Learning Designers. Furthermore, the Director attending 16 committees, and the Director and TEL Manager attending the same committees needs to discontinue. Committee-attendance, and university service tasks, need to be spread out across the whole department to enhance communication and understanding, and help with succession-planning.</p>

	Director, TEL Manager, Academic Developers and Digital Learning Designers.	
1.2.2	<p>Moodle support issues should be triaged by ICT Services, via a cross-MIC ticketing system, and only issues related to Learning and Teaching issues with Moodle should be dealt with by LEAD.</p> <p>A chatbot could be introduced by ICT Services to address common queries of all types, the chatbot can signpost the existing Knowledgebase.</p> <p>The email inbox could then be discontinued. Support for Learning and Teaching issues related to Moodle should be addressed through Professional Development, course design and re-design, drop-in sessions, recorded 'how to' sessions, website resources by Digital Learning Designers and Assistant Digital Learning Designers (NB new job title and increased grade – formerly TEL Officer).</p>	<p>It is uncommon that the unit supporting learning, teaching and assessment practice deals with such a large volume of queries without a ticketing system, and that it has to deal with much of the software-support usually provided by the ICT department. Much of this can be delivered in different ways, and digital mechanisms can remove the need for staff having to deal with low-level, repeated queries.</p> <p>Enabling staff to use their expertise to address the queries in the key offerings of LEAD should reduce the queries. Providing a progression-opportunity for staff should also help retention.</p>
1.2.3	<p>Create a structure where support for each Faculty is identified – link representatives – and support for course design and re-design is led by LEAD.</p> <p>One Academic Developer and one Digital Learning Designer should be nominally responsible for each Faculty. They should then monitor the spreadsheet of courses with planned design or re-design needs. They should make pro-active contact with course teams to set up workshops they will run together to develop course approval documentation, drawing on all relevant input, e.g., students, Library, academic learning centre, etc. This could be along the lines of the 'enABLE' process, which was recently presented to MIC.</p>	<p>It is important that the staff in both teams within LEAD work together to support academic staff in Faculties. Also, that early contact is made to work with course teams to develop meaningful engagement that will result in well-designed courses that support student learning. Staff need to be aware that LEAD is about learning, teaching and digital practice and that this is inextricably linked.</p>
1.2.4	<p>LEAD staff need to meet all together as one department regularly (fortnightly?) and communicate as one.</p>	<p>It is important to recreate the sense of one team that was enabled during the pandemic. This will be helped by the joint approach to supporting Faculties recommended above. This will also be supported by the sharing out of committee-attendance and service tasks. Reporting back from committees at a regular team meeting will be important.</p>
1.2.5	<p>MIC needs to address institutional valuing of Learning and Teaching (L&T). Consideration should be given as to how to signal that Learning and Teaching is seen as equal in</p>	<p>This recommendation has been made as staff reported that reducing engagement with LEAD activities were related to time and workload, uncertainty around promotion</p>

	<p>relation to Research when there is: lack of VP L&T; no L&T building/space for L&T enhancement; no promotion opportunities for those who support L&T enhancement; promotion is by a combined route, not separate routes of L&T or research; no mandatory L&T qualification as part of probation; no appraisal process where staff would discuss their professional development vis-a-vis L&T; no workload model where staff would indicate time spent on their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; no institutional celebration of L&T to mirror 'Research Week'. However, in recommending a celebration of Learning & Teaching activity MIC should consider a different mechanism, such as a 'Spotlight on' using blogs and social media, rather than just copying 'Research Week'.</p>	<p>processes and criteria, and that there needed to be levers for engaging, and mechanisms for ensuring the visibility of Learning and Teaching good practice.</p> <p>We noted that there is no Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for the MIC, so it is even difficult for LEAD to engage staff around institutional objectives to be achieved. It was disappointing that the VPAA did not meet with us to provide an institutional view of the value of Learning and Teaching Enhancement, and as the line manager of the Director of LEAD.</p> <p>It is important to enable the promotion of Learning and Teaching experts in support services to give them the credibility to engage with the academics they are supporting. This happens in other institutions, and internationally.</p>
1.2.6	<p>Create a formal opportunity to engage with the Students' Union.</p>	<p>If the key offering is 'to support staff to support student learning' there needs to be more engagement with the Students' Union, and enabling co-creation by academic staff.</p>

Teaching and Learning Enhancement

Commendations

2.1.1	LEAD involvement in programme design is highly regarded and seen as very impactful. An interviewee relayed, <i>"The impact on programme development is a game changer once LEAD gets involved"</i> . This encompasses both the Academic Development (AD) and Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) functions.
2.1.2	The alumni of the GCAP attest to its continued impact on their practice and its usefulness. The details shared suggest a thoughtfully designed programme with careful integration of key frameworks, such as Universal Design of Learning (UDL), and of practice supports, such as peer observation. The interdisciplinary conversations emanating from the GCAP have continued after graduation.
2.1.3	Infrastructure for enabling learning enhancement is present in the form of Teaching and Learning (T&L) champions at Faculty level, as well as twice yearly opportunities to showcase T&L innovations. The presence of LEAD on the Executive Board, and the range of committees, ensures that a T&L voice is present in a variety of fora.
2.1.4	The diversity of Professional Development offerings, scale of support, and research outputs are very impressive, particularly considering the staff turnover.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
2.2.1	<p>Explore options to make the GCAP more attractive to staff.</p> <p>This could include aligning the GCAP with the Advance HE Associate Fellow level, thus ensuring graduates have an internationally-recognised validation of impact.</p> <p>Explore implementing a robust RPL process for staff engaging in UDL badge, Peer Observation etc.</p> <p>Upskilling on digital pedagogies should be an explicit element of the GCAP.</p> <p>It may be appropriate to pause the GCAP for a year to enable these changes to happen.</p> <p>Elements of the non-credit-bearing programme should be aligned with the GCAP programme.</p>	<p>To ensure the long-term sustainability of LEAD's work, the GCAP needs to be the central plank of LEAD's Professional Development offer, and the team encouraged to step back from just-in-time support, as well as the pursuit of an MA.</p> <p>The distinctiveness of the GCAP offer could be assured by aligning with Advance HE. This may be attractive to staff who already hold pedagogical qualifications. Similarly, a robust RPL process would enable staff who have engaged previously with LEAD to complete the GCAP.</p> <p>We note the capacity issue with regard to the digital pedagogy inclusion in the GCAP programme, however there is scope to develop asynchronous content and schedule related workshops drawing on the TEL expertise to make this more manageable. By building staff capacity in digital pedagogy, it may remove staff dependency on some support aspects of the TEL team.</p>
2.2.2	Implement a mentor programme for GCAP graduates, and explore its alignment with the Advance HE Fellows level.	The GCAP alumni represent a resource that MIC can draw upon to provide disciplinary insights into T&L enhancement. Through a mentorship programme, the alumni are also enhancing and affirming their professional knowledge, and having this recognised on an

		international Professional Development Framework. The mentors can contribute to the GCAP, the LEAD seminars/workshops, share practice examples, etc. Such an approach effectively expands the LEAD network and is scalable year on year. This would also remove the need for a Dip or MA, as it is evident that there is not a strong appetite for further formal programmes, nor capacity amongst the team to deliver.
2.2.3	Develop a clear process within LEAD for how LEAD staff respond to programme design opportunities, drawing on both the AD and TEL staff.	LEAD have a vital role to play in programme design, particularly in light of the growing diverse offer of MIC. This is a missed opportunity to ensure new MIC programmes are exemplars of inclusive practice, innovative pedagogy and entwining of digital pedagogy. A clear process would also see the AD and TEL team working in partnership, which would also ensure a more collegial approach to programme development within LEAD.
2.2.4	Ensure all staff, full and part-time, can engage in the GCAP.	The primary purpose of staff Professional Development is to enhance the student experience and ensure student success. Therefore, all staff teaching in MIC, regardless of contracted hours, should be incentivised to engage in GCAP through fee waiver, or similar, with the caveat that participant contracts correspond to the duration of GCAP.
2.2.5	At an institutional level, incentivise engagement in the GCAP through the promotions process and the incoming workload model. Senior management should communicate clearly the expectation for staff to upskill and remain conversant with pedagogical innovation and specific requirements to teach in higher education in the 21 st Century and also require new staff to engage in the GCAP.	Staff repeatedly reference the lack of time to engage in the GCAP, or with LEAD offerings in general. There is a sense that T&L is not fully valued in MIC, or perhaps less so than research. While T&L is equivalent in weighting to Research in the promotion criteria, the GCAP could be more explicitly referenced in the promotion requirements, and particularly in the probation process for new staff. The incoming workload model provides an important opportunity to encourage engagement in CPD.
2.2.6	There needs to be a strategic approach to the non-credit-bearing offerings and support provided through LEAD (both AD and TEL staff). Elements of the non-credit-bearing programme should be aligned with the GCAP programme.	An overarching vision for teaching and learning in MIC is not evident in LEAD's non-credit offerings and support. The team is very stretched. Focusing on core strengths, responsive to staff need, would ensure better impact. There is rich evidence to support the development of non-credit-

		bearing offerings, drawing on insights from the TEL inbox, Knowledgebase searches, reflections of staff need in the programme design projects, etc. These could be mined to formulate a more comprehensive non-credit-bearing offer, that also aligns with the staff calendar in terms of what topics to cover at what point in the year.
2.2.7	Implement a survey of staff about what topics to cover in PD sessions which involves them choosing among a set of topics proposed, for which LEAD have experts (e.g., AD and TEL staff) and speakers (e.g., GCAP graduates) for example using a quiz approach.	Model good practice in how to engage staff, and also ensure that PD sessions actually address staff need, and engage staff in the data-collection exercise.
2.2.8	Develop an institutional level award in teaching and learning – link with institutional spotlight on teaching and learning practice.	While there is a regional award for teaching, LEAD is well-positioned to enact a MIC-level award, that recognises the excellence and innovation in teaching and learning evident amongst the MIC staff. This also ensures the distinctiveness of MIC is celebrated with the MIC/University of Limerick changing landscape.
2.2.9	Explore the possibility of incorporating Open Pedagogy/Practice as one of the new PD course offerings.	Considering the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general, and SDG 4 in particular, there appears to be no incorporation of open pedagogy or open practice within the development of T&L strategies within LEAD.

LEAD Facilities & Digital Systems

Commendations

3.1.1	Support for Moodle, see above. Everyone with whom we met referenced the support provided for Moodle, its use and dealing with issues.
3.1.2	Support for staff, despite no co-location and no assigned training rooms. Everyone with whom we met was complimentary about the support provided by LEAD staff, from both teams within the department, and their availability. The support is often provided online, likely due to the difficulty of accommodation.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
3.2.1	Changes regarding Moodle, see above and see below.	Please see above and see below.
3.2.2	LEAD staff need to be co-located, and the department needs to have some assigned training spaces.	<p>To create cohesion for LEAD staff, and to ensure academic staff know where they are (it was reported that they did not) the staff need to be co-located to enhance their working practices.</p> <p>To deliver quality training, at the right time for academic staff, training rooms need to be available for LEAD to book. Currently training is run when rooms are available, rather than when academic staff would like or need training. A year workplan cannot be drawn up, as rooms are only available out of teaching time, and in competition with others in the same situation. There is no priority booking for LEAD. We understand that the Library do not have space to provide office space for the LEAD staff in the plans for the new Library building, and the current accommodation in Summerville is not big enough, nor currently appropriate, for co-locating the entire department. No plans currently account for a LEAD training room.</p>

Technology Enhanced Learning

Commendations

4.1.1	Staff dedication. It was obvious, from both the Self-Assessment Report and the meetings with various staff from throughout the college, that LEAD is held in very high esteem for the work that they do, and the leadership and guidance they have shown during the pandemic. All of the LEAD staff that we met were dedicated to the students and staff of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and wanted to deliver the best service that they could.
4.1.2	Service Principle. The Service Principle, as articulated in the Self-Assessment Report, provided a framework and guidance through which the TEL Team operates. As a set of high-level principles, they encapsulate the approach that the TEL team takes and they are to be commended for taking the time to capture and document this.
4.1.3	Knowledgebase. The online Knowledgebase appears to be a very comprehensive resource, that is actively used in the support of academic staff, and we acknowledge that the resource is open. The capturing of search terms that do not result in a response is a useful tool to capture unmet needs, and the layout of the resource is both user-friendly and logical.
4.1.4	The suite of tools and technologies applied are well-considered and support the development of Digital Learning (TEL) in MIC.
4.1.5	The Course Design Process and the use of the ABC Learning Design methodology is commendable, and would appear to be well-considered and employed.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
4.2.1	Deprecate the use of the term TEL to the more appropriate and inclusive term of Digital Education.	The term 'Digital' is an easier to understand and apply term, and there has been considerable pushback against the "enhanced" element of the TEL acronym.
4.2.2	Secure fit-for-purpose office facilities that can be used both by the team and for staff development. They could also be used in the creation of resources and course artefacts by academic staff that may not have access to suitable space.	The current location in "Summerville" is distant from the main on-campus activity, and some of the staff we spoke with were unaware of the office location. The offices themselves were cramped, poorly signposted, and did not lend themselves to collaborative working.
4.2.3	Implement, as a matter of urgency, a system to automatically create new modules, and to enrol students on their modules at the start of each academic year or semester, to replace the current labour-intensive manual methods employed.	The current process is labour-intensive, and could potentially lead to errors. From speaking with student representatives, it appears that the manual enrolment key method employed to add students to modules has led to students not getting enrolled until later in the term than is desirable. This would also free resources for more value-add work.
4.2.4	Consider deploying chatbot technology to interface with the extensive Knowledgebase to provide front-line first contact support to teaching staff.	While the Knowledgebase is searchable, it does not leverage the conversational and support nature of a chatbot

4.2.5	Align the job titles, responsibilities, grades, contract-duration, and salary scales of what is currently termed the TEL team to grades/scales that reflect the national landscape for roles of this nature. Currently the TEL Manager is filling the vacant roles in the TEL team, and this is perhaps not the best use of his time and skillset. The manager needs to have a strategic view that operationalises the strategic ambitions of the unit.	This recommendation responds to the issues of staff turnover, and the understandable ambition of staff that leads to team members securing better paid work of a similar nature in other HEIs. It also ensures best use of time and resources of staff.
4.2.6	Ensure the Learning Designers have visibility to new and redesigned courses and modules progressing through the APAC process on a regular, scheduled basis. In line with recommendations in sections above.	The current approach seems to be demanded and very often does not involve LEAD until late in the process. Having visibility of the pipeline of work would allow for a more coordinated approach to offering support, advice and guidance on how to best leverage digital tools.
4.2.7	Consider how the CPD support that LEAD provides can be aligned to the national and institutional calendar, with a view to adopting a 'less is more' approach, i.e., to have fewer events with higher impact.	The current CPD offering supported by the team seems both broad and extensive. Some of the foundational induction activities might be better addressed in drop-in clinics and Knowledgebase approaches rather than in scheduled events.
4.2.8	Implement a Lecturer / Academic / Support CRM that tracks and manages all interactions with staff that use the services of LEAD and in particular the TEL Team. If possible, track usage of the Knowledgebase also.	An approach of this nature ensures that there is a consistent and unified approach across the service, and also captures the extent of usage of the service by academic staff. This may facilitate a campaign or survey to understand why some staff may not engage.
4.2.9	Introduce a Scorecard / Module self-evaluation process for lecturers to provide a checklist against UDL / Assessment Redesign and other institutional priorities, as part of the Moodle Baseline module.	Provides a structured opportunity for academics to reflect on their practice and look at possible improvements. Will also enable staff to consider which PD support with which to engage.
4.2.10	Encourage an action research mindset by looking to embed the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in practice. This may be asking academics to provide the rationale for teaching approach changes, and the collection of evidence to prove impact.	To embed research in praxis and integrate with the research support available across MIC.

Annex 1: Peer Review Group

Professor Harriet Dunbar-Morris NTF, PFHEA, Dean of Learning and Teaching, University of Portsmouth, Chair of the Peer Review Group

Dr Catherine O'Mahony, Director of the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), University College Cork

Dr Tom Farrelly Lecturer & Educational Developer, Munster Technological University

Mr Ken McCarthy, Head of Technology Enhanced Learning (Acting), Centre for Technology-Enhanced Learning, South East Technological University

Annex 2: Stakeholder Meetings

Vice-President of Governance and Strategy;

Director of Teaching & Learning;

Technology Enhanced Learning Manager;

Academic Developers;

Technology Enhanced Learning Staff;

Director of Research

Senior Academic Staff;

Dean of Faculty of Education;

Dean of Faculty of Arts;

Academic Staff;

Director of ICT Services;

College Librarian;

Director of Quality & PA to Vice-President Academic Affairs;

Elected Officers current and incoming of MIC Students' Union.