QUALITY ENHANCEMENT UNIT

REVIEW PANEL REPORT

IONAD NA GAEILGE LABHARTHA

Date: April 2019

"By embedding a strong quality-enhancement ethos, we will use our quality processes to ensure a culture and experience of best practice in the delivery of our academic mission, demonstrating our commitment to continuous evolution and improvement"

(UCC's Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022, p.23)

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List of Panel Members

Name	Position/Discipline	Institution
Ms Nicole Ní Laodhcha [Student Reviewer]	MA Student – Modern Irish	University College Cork
Ms Clár Ní Bhuachalla	Irish Language Officer, Bord na Gaeilge	University College Dublin
Dr Tríona Ní Shíocháin	School of Music and Theatre	University College Cork
Dr Rónán Ó Dubhghaill [Chair]	Vice-President for External Relations	University College Cork
Professor Boyd Robertson	Former Principal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig	Ex. University of the Highlands and Islands (Scotland); Honorary Professor, Edinburgh University
Dr Kay Taaffe [Panel Secretariat]	Quality Enhancement Advisor	University College Cork

Overall Analysis

Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha makes a unique contribution to the University and the wider community in relation to Irish language development, and it constitutes a leader in the fields of applied linguistics, language activism and language planning. It is evident to the Panel that the value of an t-Ionad to the overall mission and strategy of the University far exceeds any quantifiable cost. The breadth of the reach of an t-Ionad to such diverse communities – local, national and international – is striking and commendable. The Director spoke eloquently of a "corridor of Gaeltachtaí" from An Rinn in Co Waterford, through the Muscraí Gaeltacht to Corca Dhuibhne, with UCC centrally positioned along the route. A particularly important aspect therefore is an t-Ionad's engagement with the Gaeltachtaí of Munster and the associated economic benefits and socio-cultural impact that accrue from such interaction with marginalised communities. The cooperation between an t-Ionad and Scoil Léann na Gaeilge was noted and should be encouraged; this should be continued into the future, while recognising the respective distinct missions of each of these units.

There was a palpable and vibrant team spirit amongst the staff cohort that demonstrated loyalty, collegiality and a strong commitment towards a single common purpose. The Panel was impressed by the passion and enthusiasm that the staff bring to bear, and their positive influence and strong advocacy, for the Irish language. The Panel acknowledges the very significant contribution and commitment of a busy Head of School & Department in undertaking extra responsibilities for the oversight of an t-Ionad during a hiatus period after the retirement of the Director in 2015, and in the intervening period during which the Director's post has not been filled.

The physical offices of an t-Ionad and its central location is a positive asset to the work and presence of the unit on the University campus. The Panel noted a significant interest and commitment to the Irish language on the part of individuals within the Senior Management Team of the University – further expressed at institutional level in UCC's Strategic Plan "Independent Thinking, Shared Ambition" – and the opportunity to leverage this good will and influence towards Irish language and culture with the support of UCC's leadership team.

Methodology and Site Visit

The Site Visit for Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha (IGL) took place over three days in April 2019. The timetable was comprehensive and enabled consultation with key stakeholders, including senior management of the University, students, and external stakeholders (see appendix 1 for a copy of the timetable). There was extensive engagement with the Professor of Modern Irish (who is also acting as Director of the Ionad), with Ionad staff, and with the Deputy President and Registrar.

The Panel brought together national and international peer expertise in the field of Gaelic and minority language learning. Internal reviewers provided knowledge of institutional and organisational structures within UCC and were invited on the basis of their interest in, and passion for, the Irish language. The student reviewer, who is immersed in the scholarship of Irish language, brought experience of Irish language learning both within UCC and externally to UCC. Secretariat support from the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) was provided to the Peer Review Panel throughout to facilitate the review process and to support the Review Panel in formulating and agreeing the final Panel Report.

Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The SER was presented in Irish with an English translation. A key objective stated on p.17 is: "to promote the Irish Language among the UCC community, its surrounding community in the city and county, as well as supporting presentation and growth of the language in the Munster Gaeltacht regions". The relationship with the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht is identified in the SER – particularly with Dún Chíomháin, which is a UCC centre for Irish learning situated close to the town of Baile an Fheirtéaraigh, and managed by Ionad staff. The Ionad identified excellence in teaching and administration, international renown, public relations and presence in city and surrounding areas as key strengths. The fact that Irish is viewed favourably by UCC is acknowledged as an opportunity. Benchmarking was against Lárionad na Gaeilge (LG) at NUI Maynooth. A key difference is that IGL offers accredited modules; LG however, has developed Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) which is a standardised tool based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Unit details including staff profile

Centrally located in the O'Rahilly Building, an t-Ionad has eleven staff, including three at Dún Chíomháin (two managers in Kerry are job-sharing). Seven staff combine teaching with other functions (administration, computer assisted learning (CAL), and translation). An t-Ionad also has a number of part-time teachers (5 – 10 variably). The SER states that "over half of UCC's international student body use the services of an t-Ionad". IGL uses Erasmus+ programmes to run courses in Spain and Germany. A number of staff are proficient in the adaptation of ICT for teaching and learning – with the recent developments at Dún Chíomháin providing an example of a "Next Generation Learning Space".

Developments since last review

The Panel could not find any significant evidence within the Self-Evaluation Report that the recommendations of the previous review in 2011 had been implemented. The Panel suggests that an t-Ionad considers implementation of the remaining recommendations of the previous review. It should, for example, undertake international benchmarking against an institution in Wales (as recommendation in the previous Panel Report). [1]

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[1] Ionad na Gaeilge Labharta was previously reviewed in 2011, arising from the Quality Review an Action Plan to address the recommendations was developed. Progress of the Action Plan is documented in a Follow-Up Report 2013. https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/qualityenhancementunit/reports/admin/IonadnaGaeilgeLabharthaFollowUp2013.pdf). This report indicates the recommendations implemented, in progress and those deferred. The previous full-time Director of An t-Ionad retired in 2014.

Findings of the Panel

Strategic Planning

The Panel was made aware of the circumstances that arose after the retirement of the previous Director in 2015, whereby the Head of Scoil Léann na Gaeilge filled the void on a temporary basis. However, this post has not been filled in the intervening period. Recognising the distinct mission of an t-Ionad, the Panel perceives the role of a full-time Director as an identified senior advocate for the provision and active promotion of Irish Language services across the University and beyond; this role would enable the full potential of an t-Ionad and its staff to be realised through the impact of its work in fostering, promotion and preservation of the Irish language. The sustainability and long-term development of an t- Ionad will depend greatly on the vacant Director's post being filled on a full-time basis, so as to ensure that the cross-cutting University contribution and services provided by the unit to a wide variety of learners, internal and external stakeholders can be maintained and enhanced into the future.

The Panel noted that the visibility and profile of an t- Ionad was not optimal – there appears to be a communication gap with staff and students across the University. It is evident that the absence of the full-time Director position being filled has created a vulnerability and a lack of profile for an t-Ionad within the overall University structure and insecurity for an t-Ionad itself. The new Director, once appointed, should develop and implement a communication strategy to increase the visibility, profile and accessibility of an t- Ionad for all staff and students of the University, and the wider community. There is an urgent need to fill the vacancy of the full-time Director and re-appoint the role of the Director to ensure the cohesion and sustainability of an t- Ionad into the future and to re-establish its high profile presence across the UCC campus community and beyond.

Governance

The relationship between Bord na Gaeilge and an t-Ionad should be clarified in terms of the development of an Irish language strategy for UCC and the potential for the Bord to act in an advisory capacity for an t-Ionad. In line with University governance procedures, there should be an external member on the Bord at all times.

Student support & impact on the student body

The contribution of an t-Ionad staff, in particular their support of student Irish speakers and the wider community in the University, was acknowledged by all staff and students who met with the Panel. There were many examples of creative, innovative and thoughtful module and course creation, coupled with a responsive approach to the needs of students. These included, for example, modules for Pharmacy students and the provision of Irish language training for teachers to enable them to teach through the medium of Irish. The development of new modules being taught through Irish, especially in Medicine and Computer Science, was commended. Staff have a key role in promoting international education at UCC, through the unique Irish language offerings, including Irish at *ab initio* level and the associated positive referrals by word of mouth. The development of the Gaeltacht semester, and the use of technology and "new generation learning space" in Dún Chíomháin, is an example of innovative community engagement, simultaneously providing opportunities for UCC students and significant potential for addressing the direct needs of the local Irish-speaking community.

There were examples of blended learning developments already in place with the potential to develop further. The experience of students residing at Áras Úi Thuama (the Students' Residence Scheme) was very positive and engaging, and had a beneficial impact on their language acquisition. The success of this is demonstrated, not only by Irish students, but also by the experience of North American

students. Students were interested in increasing opportunities for speaking Irish outside of the classroom – having physical and social spaces to engage with like-minded peers – and would welcome the provision of a range of opportunities to encourage Irish language learning and usage beyond the classroom. The provision of a dedicated Irish language space, complementary to the Global Lounge, in the new Student Hub building should be actively sought to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity and to reflect the status of Irish as a marginalised indigenous language (such as already exist at NUIG, UCD, TCD and UL).

An t-Ionad's use of social media as a communication tool is effective (e.g. *Ná caill do sheans!*) and this good work should be kept up. Given the skills of the staff in this area, the Panel was of the opinion that there are opportunities to explore partnerships for digital learning and online provision of courses with appropriate resources.

Staff development and workload

The staff expertise as linguists is exceptional, in particular the combination of practical teaching experience and applied language planning coupled with research activities. Staff are informed by a range of international links and an increasing international footprint through experiences of teaching in international third level contexts. The translation service was regarded highly by University service users, in particular the OCLA function, and this service is also provided to external agencies.

There is a need to ensure that effective succession planning approaches are in place in light of the career stages of the staff cohort. A key aspect of this will be futureproofing and stabilising an t- Ionad's development through the appointment of a full-time Director. Given the multiple roles that many staff currently undertake – and the increased workloads arising from recent developments outlined above – the staffing complement, configuration, roles and responsibilities should be reviewed, both in the main campus and at Dún Chíomháin. While regular monthly meetings are held during term time to which all staff are invited, including those based in Dún Chíomháin, distances between locations make it difficult for all staff to be present. Some consideration should be made to enable staff at both locations to meet face to face at least once or twice per semester.

There is an evident willingness amongst staff to employ technology, both for teaching and communication with students. Staff expertise in this area is very important for student engagement and, consequently, maintaining technological currency and staff development around the use of technology will be essential.

Communication, engagement and impact

The Panel is most impressed with the level of development and community engagement that has continued unabated by staff at an t-Ionad; there is concern, however, that the impact and potential of this activity is not being fully realised in the absence of a full-time Director to support staff and provide ongoing strategic direction. The voluntary contribution of an t-Ionad staff, as individuals outside their roles at UCC, to the development of the Cork City Language Plan demonstrates their commitment to language development within the broader community. Community engagement with marginalised urban communities through the provision of Irish language training for teachers and community support is laudable. The level of community contribution of the staff at Dún Chíomháin, above and beyond their direct responsibilities, is highly commended by the Panel – working with local young people, teenagers' drama project, family support, older population etc. This engagement also extends to contributing to the language planning committee for the area.

The Panel recommends that an t-Ionad continues to explore further engagement and partnerships with Gaeltachtaí, which contribute to the economic impact of local communities. In doing this work,

an t-Ionad contributes greatly to the "third mission" of the University and brings significant value when measured against the social and economic impact in local communities. The Panel was of the opinion that there is potential for an t-Ionad to be an active partner in the development of Cork as a Baile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta and to engage fully with national agencies on a more formal basis as part of their remit.

Resources and Finances

To enable delivery of its strategy and plans, an t-Ionad requires clarity around funding and income streams and the underlying budgetary assumptions and constraints to inform day to day operations and future planned developments. The cost versus value in terms of economic impact to local communities has already been mentioned, as has the unquantifiable value that an t-Ionad delivers resulting in tangible high socio-cultural impact in key areas. Gaeltacht areas are in decline in terms of population and employment so the work of an t-Ionad and UCC is important for the development and sustenance of those regions, and for fostering Irish-speaking communities both within and outside of Gaeltacht regions. The importance of this for the realisation of UCC's strategic objectives both for equality, diversity and inclusion, and for targeted initiatives to support the Irish language, is immense. In light of common social and economic interests, the Panel recommends that potential funding streams and partnership initiatives are explored through, for example, Foras na Gaeilge.

Engagement/compliance of the Unit with external policy drivers

An t-Ionad delivers accredited and non-accredited modules and courses to a wide range of stakeholders, both internally within UCC and externally. While continuing to cater for a spectrum of interests – from enthusiasts to those seeking accreditation – there is potential to explore the possibility of accreditation for current course offerings under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, along with the use of digital badges, to provide learners with appropriate credentials for the learning achieved.

Recommendations for Enhancement

Recommendations to an t-Ionad

Strategy

1. A Strategic Plan is required to provide overall direction for an t-Ionad into the future through clear articulation of priorities which will enable medium and long-term operational planning

2. This should capture the distinctive contribution of an t-Ionad's applied language mission and differentiate this from the academic mission of the School while recognising their complementarity

3. The Panel endorses the recommendation of the last review to implement an Advisory Board which would support the strategy of an t-Ionad and support the role of the Director

Leadership and Management

4. The sustainability and long-term development of an t-Ionad will depend greatly on the vacant Director's post being filled on a full-time basis, so as to ensure that the cross-cutting University contribution and services provided by the unit to a wide variety of learners, internal and external stakeholders can be maintained and enhanced into the future

5. The role of full-time Director as an identified senior advocate for the provision and active promotion of Irish Language services across the University and beyond should enable the full potential of an t-Ionad and its staff to be realised through the impact of its work in fostering, promotion and preservation of the Irish language

6. The Director should develop and implement a communication strategy to increase the visibility and accessibility of an t-Ionad for all staff and students of the University, and the wider community

Staff

7. There is a need for a formal communications system which should ensure that regular meetings are held for all staff, to include those based at Dún Chíomháin

8. The staffing complement, configuration, roles and responsibilities should be reviewed, both in the main campus and at Dún Chíomháin

9. There is a need to ensure that effective succession planning approaches are in place in light of the career stages of the staff cohort

Resources and Finance

10. To enable delivery of its strategy and plans, an t-Ionad requires clarity around funding and income streams and the underlying budgetary assumptions and constraints to inform day to day operations and future planned developments

11. An t-Ionad should explore potential funding streams and partnership initiatives through, for example, Foras na Gaeilge

Governance

12. The relationship between Bord na Gaeilge and an t-Ionad should be clarified in terms of the development of an Irish language strategy for UCC and the potential for the Bord to act in an advisory capacity for an t-Ionad. In line with UCC governance procedures, there should be an external member on the Bord at all times

Community interface and engagement (internal and external)

13. The provision of a range of opportunities to encourage Irish language learning and usage outside the classroom should be explored and developed further

14. There is potential for an t-Ionad to be an active partner in the development of Cork as a Baile Seirbhse Gaeltachta and to engage fully with national agencies

15. The provision of a dedicated Irish language space, complementary to the Global Lounge, in the new Student Hub building should be actively sought to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity and to reflect the status of Irish as a marginalised indigenous language (such as already exist at NUIG, UCD, TCD and UL)

16. An t-Ionad should continue to explore further engagement and partnerships with Gaeltachtaí

Accreditation and benchmarking

17. An t-Ionad should explore the possibility of accreditation for current course offerings under the European Framework along with the use of digital badges to provide learners with appropriate credentials for the learning achieved

Recommendations to the University

1. While Irish is the national and first official language, it is also a minority language. The University should take the steps necessary to ensure that the advancement of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agendas take account of the particular circumstances - cultural, socio-economic and linguistic - of Irish language communities

2. That the status of Ionad staff be considered within the framework of a University wide review of administrative units with particular reference to the teaching and applied linguistic nature of much of the Ionad's activities.

Appendix 1 - Panel Site Visit Timetable

Tuesday 9 April 2019	
12.00 – 13.30	Convening of Panel members. Briefing by Director of Quality Enhancement followed by lunch.
13.30 – 14.30	Private meeting of Panel
14.30 – 15.30	Meeting with Head, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha (to be joined by the Ionad's Administrator at 15.10)
15.30 – 16.00	Tea/coffee *Private meeting of Panel*
16.00 – 16.50	Meeting with Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha staff
17.00 – 18.00	Meeting with External Stakeholders Programme Participant Gael Taca
19.00	Informal dinner for members of the Panel & staff members of the Unit

Wednesday 10 April 2019 Venue: Tower Room 1	
08.45 – 09.00	Convening of the Panel
09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with Internal Stakeholders (Academic) Vice President for Learning and Teaching Students Union, Commercial and Communications Officer Head of Research Collections, Boole Library Applied Social Studies
09.45 – 10.15	Meeting with Chair of Bord na Gaeilge
10.15 – 10.45	Tea/Coffee

10.45 – 11.15	Meeting with Dún Chíomháin staff: Managers of Dún Chíomháin
11.15 – 11.30	**Panel moves to G01 in the ORB**
11.30 – 12.15	Panel meets representatives of students: 1st Year Students x 3 3rd Year Students x 2 4th Year Student 5th Year Student International Students x 3 PhD Student Student
12.15 – 12.30	Meeting with Business Development and Finance Manager, Office of the Deputy President & Registrar
12.30 – 13.30	**Return to Tower Room** Lunch and private meeting of the Panel
13.30 – 14.30	Private meeting of Panel
14.30 – 15.15	Meeting with Deputy Vice President & Registrar
15.15 – 15.45	Tea/coffee
15.45 – 16.30	Meeting with Internal Stakeholders (Managerial, Admin) Head, Student Health Representative from OCLA Visiting Student Coordinator, International Office Director, Buildings & Estates
16.30 – 17.00	Meeting with part-time tutors
18.00	Working private dinner for members of the Panel to commence drafting the report.

Thursday 11 April 2019	
08.45 – 10.00	Convening and Meeting of the Panel
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with Head of Unit
11.00 – 11.30	Tea/coffee and private meeting of Panel

| 11.30 – 12.00 | Closing presentation |
| 12.00 – 15.00 | Further work on drafting the final report (lunch) |