



QUALITY REVIEW  
PEER REVIEW PANEL REPORT  
SCHOOL OF HISTORY

*Enhancement is a cornerstone of UCC's quality culture promoting the success and reputation of the university through an active commitment to critically assessing and refining institutional activities to better meet the diverse needs of learners, stakeholders and wider society.  
(UCC's Quality Enhancement Policy)*

**April 2026**

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## Preface

The **Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) (amended 2019)** established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as the national quality authority and previously established universities as Degree Awarding Bodies (DABs). Section 28 of the Act sets out the requirement to “establish procedures for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training and research and related services the provider provides”.

The Act requires that institutions’ procedures for quality evaluate on a periodic basis the quality of education, training and research and related services at least once every seven years. The outcomes of such reviews should lead to a published review report and implementation of actions. As part of the national monitoring framework each institution provides an Annual Quality Report to QQI which confirms the details of its cycle of internal quality review.

## Context

The School of History is one of the oldest academic entities in UCC, having been established as a discipline in 1849 when the institution’s name was Queen’s College Cork. It then grew over the years with various specialisations being developed over time.

Currently one of the Schools within the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, it resulted from the merger of three History Departments in the early 1990s and, subsequently, the integration with the discipline of History of Art, as part of the process of schoolification begun by University College Cork around three decades ago. The amalgamation of History and History of Art appears to be still ongoing, having encountered resistance from within, connected with the fear of dissolution of disciplinary identity.

The School has 29 academic staff, 6 Professional Management Support Services Staff and one researcher, with a prevailing male staff component (56 % male vs 44 % female in 2025/26), mostly distributed among higher graded roles. It is part of UCC Futures, the new institutional research framework, i.e., through three staff members being affiliated with the Future Humanities Institute via the Radical Humanities Laboratory. Schol staff also contribute to College-level committees.

The School delivers one undergraduate programme, 8 postgraduate taught programmes and two postgraduate research programmes, as well as undergraduate service teaching to many Schools primarily within the College of CACSSS. Indeed, the School is the backbone of UCC’s Arts degrees (CK101 and CK108) and has witnessed a steady increase of undergraduate student enrolment numbers over the years, countering the decline in Arts programmes enrolment experienced by many other Irish and European universities. On the other hand, postgraduate numbers have fallen significantly, having nearly halved from five years ago.

The School of History traditionally maintained a prominent public profile over the years and, more recently, played a significant role in national and international public events and conferences for the centenaries celebration, such as the Irish Atlases Projects (2017-2024).

## Methodology and Site Visit

Since 2022 UCC has followed a hybrid review model comprising of a 2-day-on-campus site visit and 2 half-day virtual meetings.

This review took place over 2 weeks from 25 March to 1 April 2026. During the site visit, the Panel met with staff, students, the relevant Head of College (Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences), senior officers' deputies and relevant stakeholders. Although the Panel was chaired by the UCC VP for Learning and Teaching, the Panel noted that many ULT members were not available during its site visit. The sequencing of meetings was organised to ensure coherence and progression in the conduct of the review. The platform used for the virtual meetings was MS Teams. During the virtual meetings, the Panel focused on writing the Report with a particular emphasis on commendations, recommendations and observations. The timetable for the site visit (Appendix B) afforded appropriate time to engage with a broad variety of stakeholders.

The Panel brought together internal and international peer reviewers (Panel profiles can be found in Appendix A). The internal reviewers provided knowledge of institutional and organisational structures with the external Panel members contributing their peer expertise. The student Panel member brought valuable insights and perspectives on student issues. At the end of the site visit, the Panel presented its initial findings – commendations, recommendations and observations – to the staff of the School.

To support the Peer Review Panel and facilitate effective engagement throughout the site visit, additional guidance and support was provided by staff of the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) in UCC. This included technical support, as well as briefing and advisory support prior to and throughout the review. Review coordination was provided throughout by a Review Coordinator to facilitate the review process and to support the Peer Review Panel in formulating and agreeing the final Panel Report.

The Panel agreed on the outcomes of the Report. The Report was compiled collaboratively and the entire Panel contributed to the production of the final document. In addition to the report, the Panel also unanimously supported the decision that the Chair meets with the Head of College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences to discuss the strategic dimensions of the Panel's findings which can shape the development of the School, securing its sustainability into the future.

## Panel Members

Refer to Appendix A for detailed Panel profiles.

Name	Position/Discipline	Institution
Ms Aimee Cronin	School of Chemistry	University College Cork
Associate Professor Caitlin Ellis	Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History	University of Oslo
Professor Peter Gray	School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics	Queen's University Belfast
Professor Andrew James Hopkins	Architectural Historian	University of L'Aquila
Professor Paul McSweeney (Chair)	Vice-President for Learning and Teaching	University College Cork
Professor Mohamad Saab	School of Nursing and Midwifery	University College Cork

Review Coordinator		
Dr Silvia Brandi	Quality Enhancement Unit	University College Cork
IT and Logistics Coordinator		
Ms Deirdre O'Brien	Quality Enhancement Unit	University College Cork

## Quality Review Purpose and Objectives

The **purpose** of Quality Review is to provide an enhancement-led, reliable peer evaluation process that supports UCC's strategic goals for excellence, the development of a quality culture, ongoing organisational development and the assurance and enhancement of education and training, research and services provided by the University. External peer review provides access to wider perspectives, often international, on the effectiveness of the university's practices as well as expert advice on new and developing approaches at the forefront of higher education.

## Quality Review Objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of a unit's processes for maintaining high standards across its functions, using a data-informed approach, with reference to internal policies, national quality requirements and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

- To assess the quality and academic standards of the unit’s research and learning and teaching activities, embedding academic integrity and EDI principles and ensuring alignment with UCC’s Strategic Plan.
- To review the unit’s contribution to the broader mission of UCC as a trusted public institution, including its engagement with societal needs and public service.
- To provide a basis for planning and continuous enhancement, through evidence-based reflection on strengths, challenges, and future opportunities.
- To identify and share the good practice of the unit with internal and external audiences through publication on the Good Practice Mosaic and dissemination through a range of communication channels.

## Commendations, Recommendations & Observations

### Commendations

Based on the information obtained from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and meetings with multiple internal and external stakeholders to the School of History, the Panel made the following commendations to the School.

- 1. The Panel commends the School’s Self-Evaluation Committee and staff for the well-written, candid and comprehensive SER, reflective of a thorough and honest self-evaluation process and a positive engagement from the School with the Panel during its site visit to UCC.** The Panel appreciates that the School frankly flagged out the existing difficulties in its SER and site visit meetings and sought the Panel’s support and guidance for solving them and strengthening the School into the future. Most of the SER’s identified points of recommendation have been taken on board by the Panel in this report.
- 2. All the Students at the site visit expressed great satisfaction with the quality of teaching, supervision and pastoral care received and praised the competence and dedication demonstrated by School staff.**
- 3. The Panel commends the many Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)-informed developments in the School since the last quality review, which reflect a commitment to inclusion and diversity within the curriculum as well as EDI-informed research.** These include the appointment of a Lecturer in Women’s and Cultural History and a Professor in Irish Gender Studies, the introduction of modules in social history, women and public health, Irish Travellers and LGBT+ History in Ireland, as well as Apartheid in South Africa and the history of Black and Women’s movements.
- 4. The Panel is impressed by the breadth of outreach initiatives delivered by the School and sustained successes in public engagement and dissemination to wide audiences of its research.** A representative sample of initiatives entitled ‘School of History’s Outreach and Public Engagement through Research’ was presented at the site visit. They covered the Atlases Projects in Irish history (‘Mapping the Irish Civil War Project, 2022-2024’); ongoing dissemination of medieval Ireland’s contribution to Europe (‘Ireland and the birth of Europe DFA Exhibition’); the innovative focus on gender in Irish History (‘Gender and Public Health

History’); and finally, social engagement through research (‘Research and Social Engagement’).

5. **The Panel compliments the School for succeeding in maintaining steady undergraduate student enrolment numbers over recent years.** At a time when Arts disciplines in many universities, nationally and internationally, have experienced serious student registration decline, the School’s success in maintaining its student numbers provides an important pipeline for postgraduate studies at UCC, as many of its graduates enrol in master’s programmes offered by the University.
6. **The Panel regards the School’s research outputs and successes as proportionately high, given the small number of senior academics and professors in the School.** The Panel were particularly impressed with the recent European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant, given its competitive nature.
7. **The Panel compliments the School on the external stakeholders’ appetite for enhanced strategic engagement with them.** Among various forms of involvements with the School, they demonstrated particular interest in History and History of Art students’ engagement in placements and research-based projects at local heritage organisations.
8. **The Panel praises the examples of innovative and sought after MA programmes and teaching approaches covered in the SER and presented during the site visit.** These include the MA in Global Gallery Studies, MA in Strategic Studies, and MA in International Relations, as well as teaching approaches in large classroom settings, such as Team-Based Learning, which favour student engagement and peer collaboration in large classroom settings, countering the sense of isolation usually experienced in crowded venues with hundreds of attendees.

### Summary Recommendations

Based on the information obtained from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and meetings with multiple internal and external stakeholders to the School of History, the Panel made the following recommendations to the School.

1. **The Panel recommends that the School effectively completes the process of School integration as well as reconsidering the name of the School.**
2. **The Panel recommends that the School seeks workable solutions to address the risk of decreasing postgraduate taught (PGT) student numbers in the School’s programmes in line with imminent academic retirements.**
3. **Considering the financial deficit in the School, the Panel recommends that the School continues to conduct a thorough review of its PGT programme portfolio to maintain continuing relevance, viability and income generation.**
4. **The Panel recommends that the School reviews the current School Research Plan to ensure it fosters the development of a strong research culture and to increase research dissemination, research funding, and research student numbers.**
5. **The Panel recommends that the School reviews its internal communications processes and establishes initiatives to enhance their effectiveness.**
6. **The Panel recommends that the School develops a range of initiatives to foster informal collaborations and social mixing in the School across disciplinary divisions, favouring the development of a shared School identity and culture.**

7. The Panel recommends that the School leads a workload management initiative to address increasing staff workload and morale implications with a view of developing a transparent and balanced school-level workload model.
8. The Panel recommends that the School undertakes a review of School assessment strategies to consider the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) while maintaining the integrity, authenticity, and discipline-specific standards of assessment across all programmes.
9. The Panel recommends that the School develops a physical infrastructural upgrade plan, cognisant of both operational and strategic considerations, with short, medium and long-term implementation details.
10. The Panel recommends that academic staff members at the School increase their engagement with Learning and Teaching programmes, Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education (SATLE), and Erasmus+ and UNIC staff mobility opportunities.

### **Recommendations – Further Detail**

The Panel consider the first three recommendations as a priority for the School and advises the Head of School, in conjunction with the School Executive Management Committee, to immediately engage in their implementation to enhance the School's governance and effectiveness and also its sustainability into the future.

1. **The Panel recommends that the School takes all the necessary steps to effectively complete the process of school integration, as a matter of priority, in alignment with the requirements of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS), as well as reconsidering the name of the School to provide due visibility and recognition to its main disciplinary components.**

The Panel acknowledges the existence of significant disciplinary distinctiveness and identity within the School of History. Yet, it believes that this is compatible with an effective centralised School governance structure, the development of stronger leadership at School level and a strong and visible School identity. This not only would strengthen the visibility and impact of the School and eliminate duplication but is also required by University Statute (E.4). For this purpose, the Panel suggests that they:

- a. Reorganise the School as a unitary structure with History and History of Art operating together as a single School with a shared vision, mission, governance and decision-making processes, while protecting disciplinary identities and take initiatives to make all the disciplinary identities feel included, cherished, valued and protected within a strong shared and coherent School identity.
- b. Rename the School as 'School of History and History of Art', which reflects its identity and appears to be supported by the great majority of School staff who met with the Panel.
- c. Streamline School committees and review their membership criteria accordingly, eliminating duplication (particularly between History and History of Art), ensuring proportional representation from disciplinary strands and genders, as well as consistency of approaches across the School beyond disciplinary boundaries.

- d. Reconsider the optimal composition of the School Executive Management Committee according to the reconfigured School structure. Consider including standing committee chairs as members, while aiming for proportional gender representation.
- e. Review the School Rules to ensure that they reflect the new structure. The School Executive Management Committee should meet at least monthly with minutes made available to the School through an accessible portal (see Recommendation 5).
- f. Establish consistent titles and duties across the School (e.g., Programme Directors, Programme Coordinators, Year Coordinators and so on), in line with University and College requirements, ensuring that every staff member's programme-related responsibilities are known to the other staff members. In addition, the Panel recommends that the School considers rotating leadership roles to build capacity among its staff.

The Panel also believes that it would be advantageous for School integration if it engaged in the following activities:

- Developing an explicit and more comprehensive organogram than the one included in the SER supplied to the Panel. This should describe School governance structures and lines of reporting in practice, including an indication of all the existing committees and the relationships between them.
- Reviewing the School's website to ensure that it reflects its new reconfiguration as a School, with evidence of a strong shared identity and visual coherence throughout (e.g., all staff members appearing in one place, among other changes).
- Communicating School identity consistently within and beyond the University, by using branding artefacts such as email signatures, which represent both the School and disciplinary affiliation (this should apply also to the Virtual Learning Environment). This must be done, taking into account UCC's Brand and Visual Identity guidelines.
- In the medium- to long-term, seeking the amalgamation of the School into a single building to further facilitate School integration and social mixing.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School, in conjunction with the School Executive Management Committee.

**2. The Panel recommends that the School seeks workable solutions to address the risk of decreasing postgraduate taught (PGT) student numbers in line with imminent academic retirements in the School.**

For this purpose, the Panel suggests that they:

- a. Consult with the College HR Business Manager to develop a staffing plan (inclusive of succession planning) to ensure it will address forthcoming staff retirements within the next 5 to 10 years and guarantee the delivery of the School's teaching, research and public engagement outputs. This needs to include income-generating initiatives to fund replacement for retired colleagues.
- b. Consider creative ways of accommodating an increase in student places in thriving MA programmes such as International Relations and Strategic Studies (e.g., co-supervision, team-supervision) and review time allocated for supervision of MA dissertations.

- c. Review its portfolio of PGT programmes and explore opportunities for income growth (see Recommendation 3).
- d. Consider a range of creative viable financial solutions to fund future posts, including the Chairs in Irish History and History of Art. This may include continuing to explore philanthropic opportunities, with the support of Cork University Foundation and the Advancement Office (former Alumni & Development), capitalising on past and recent prestigious achievements of the School in terms of broad public outreach and engagement such as the Irish Atlas Projects (2017–2024).
- e. Establish School mentoring structures and processes to support staff in realising their full potential in terms of personal and professional development and facilitate the growth of senior leadership through successful outcomes in future institutional promotions rounds.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School, in conjunction with a newly formed School Executive Management Committee.

**3. Considering the financial deficit in the School, the Panel recommends that the School continues to conduct a thorough review of its PGT programme portfolio to maintain continuing relevance, viability and income generation.**

This includes:

- a. Setting minimum student numbers required to run programmes and rationalise no longer viable programmes.
- b. Consulting with the CACSSS International Recruitment Officer to discuss avenues for the development of MA programmes in areas where the School can meet global student application trends and demands, as well as better marketing of existing programmes.
- c. Conducting a benchmarking exercise and market research to assess the viability of developing a new MA programme drawing on, and combining together, the innovative EDI curricular components, which already strongly feature in the School’s curriculum.

In addition to the above, the Panel advises the School to consider the development of additional online and hybrid MA programmes with a vocational dimension and global reach, adopting as a blueprint the successful MA in Global Galleries Studies. This could target both local and global markets, bypass accommodation challenges in Cork and facilitate the School of History’s growth of its international (non-EU) cohort from the current 8%. Indeed, CACSSS’s aim for the next five years is to reach an international (non-EU) student cohort mix of 15%. Among the other ideas that emerged during site visit engagements with various stakeholders, the Panel is of the view that the School could assess the viability of repackaging the BA in History as an integrated 4-year masters programme to ensure progression from undergraduate to postgraduate taught programmes within the School.

It also appeared that greater efforts could be made in promoting the School’s PGT programme portfolio among the many undergraduate students of the School and, more generally, among UCC undergraduates. It would be also advisable for the School to consult with the International Office and VP Global Engagement to consider the development of joint MA programmes with international institutions with a strong History and/or History of Art specialisation and strong

interests in establishing joint programmes and student exchanges with Irish institutions. Some of the University stakeholders pointed out that the School could consider establishing collaboration and networks with UNIC partner Universities, including the establishment of innovative joint undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, similar to other Schools in CACSSS. Similarly, it was suggested that there is potential for establishing joint master's programmes with other Schools in CACSSS and the other three colleges (i.e., SEFS and COMH and CBL) to secure increased graduate employability and attractiveness of programmes.

Finally, as also strategically advised by the Head of College during the Panel Site Visit, the School would greatly benefit from mapping out, documenting and visualising the School's service to the University in terms of supply of graduates for PGT programmes in other Schools across the four colleges that then benefit from the higher PGT fees; this could serve as compelling evidence for their negotiations with the College and University.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School and the School Manager, in conjunction with a newly formed School Internationalisation Committee.

**4. The Panel recommends that the School reviews the current School Research Plan to ensure it fosters the development of a strong research culture within the School and to increase research dissemination, research funding and research student numbers, consistent with the institutional strategic prioritisation of Research and Innovation and the UCC Futures Framework.**

This includes:

- a. Systematically mapping out all current staff's research activities to identify strategic strengths as well as establishing research clusters and making them visible on the School's website.
- b. Looking at areas of capacity to leverage increased grant capture and research strengths within the UCC Futures landscape (more specifically the Future Humanities Institute and Collective Social Futures) to support bids for the reconfigured national funding stream, Research Ireland, as well as other relevant national and international funding opportunities such as the ERC, while fostering greater academic staff engagement with and promotion of UCC Futures through proactive involvement in multidisciplinary research proposals and projects.

In implementing this recommendation, the School could make greater use of the available research support functions, such as OVPRI (to explore funding opportunities and avail of services in supporting pre- and post-award) and the soon to be established Doctoral Institute (to avail of supports available for research supervisors and students).

It would be also worth considering the following actions: establishing an internal mentoring mechanism for junior academics within the School (e.g., involving junior academics as co-supervisors) and regular, both formal and informal, research-sharing initiatives within the School (e.g., Brown Bag Research Lunch Chats); engaging with the University to source financial support for funding small research/internship schemes to subsidise undergraduate and postgraduate students' temporary involvement in research projects conducted by the School; ensuring that research students are integrated in the academic fabric of the School and have regular

opportunities for peer exchange within the School and beyond; celebrating and disseminating School research successes of undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research students in the School inspiring them to become the next generation of School researchers, including the promotion of the UCC's Student History Journal.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School, in conjunction with the School Research Committee.

**5. The Panel recommends that the School reviews its internal communications processes and establishes initiatives to enhance their effectiveness.**

**6. The Panel recommends that the School develops a range of initiatives to foster informal collaborations and social mixing in the School across disciplinary divisions, favouring the development of a shared School identity and culture.**

These two recommendations are interconnected and could be addressed by putting in place structures and processes to enable clear two-way reporting and communication processes across the School's disciplinary boundaries and with CACSSS, as well as the Future Humanities Institute and Radical Humanities Lab.

The School Manager could also lead on constituting a School's virtual portal/hub (e.g., SharePoint), accessible by all the School Staff, to store all the School's documentation (e.g., School rules, policies and procedures, Committee membership details; Programme and Curriculum Leadership roles; details of School representatives in College/University Committees; communication from College/University, as well as abridged minutes from Committee meetings, School Assembly, Executive Management Committee and so on) to ensure transparency about School matters of relevance for all the staff. The School should ensure all members of the team are fully apprised on strategic and operational developments and direction at School, College and University levels, as well as within the research structures of 'Future Humanities Institute' and 'Radical Humanities Laboratory'.

The Panel considers it beneficial for the School to organise regular, periodic initiatives that promote collaborative decision-making, inclusion opportunities (e.g., School Away Days for staff), social mixing, including celebration of achievements (e.g., appointments, awards, marriages, births of child and so on) and acknowledgement of difficulties (e.g., bereavement).

These recommendations should be led by the Head of School and School Manager, in conjunction with a reconfigured School Executive Management Committee.

**7. The School should lead on a workload management initiative to address increasing staff workload and morale implications with a view of developing a transparent and balanced School-level workload model.**

In doing so, the Panel advise that they:

- a. Liaise with the CACSSS College Manager and request available workload model templates that can be adapted to the School.
- b. Within the workload management initiative, take into account the range of responsibilities undertaken by Academic staff, seeking feedback by both staff

components so that the newly adopted models are fully reflective of teaching, research, community engagement and administrative responsibilities.

Although workload issues were discussed primarily in relation to academic staff, the Panel suggests that the School considers an equivalent process of workload management for Professional, Managerial and Support Staff (PMSS) members.

A successful implementation of this recommendation will also rely on ensuring that all School staff are aware of how individual workloads are allocated and calculated and feel that the models are transparent and fair for all.

In parallel, to address the staff's low morale and concerns with promotion processes and outcomes, the School should consider developing a range of staff support measures to enable academic and PMSS staff to identify and pursue suitable Personal & Professional Development pathways and promotion opportunities; establishing School mentoring structures and processes to support staff in realising their full potential in terms of personal and professional development and facilitate the growth of senior leadership through successful outcomes in future institutional promotions rounds.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School, in conjunction with a reconfigured School Executive Management Committee and in consultation with the wider staff base.

**8. The Panel recommends that the School undertakes a review of School assessment strategies to consider the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) while maintaining the integrity, authenticity and discipline-specific standards of assessment across all programmes.**

In doing so, the Panel advise that they:

- a. Develop and regularly update a School-level assessment framework that clearly defines acceptable and unacceptable uses of generative AI, while taking into consideration UCC's Toolkit for the Ethical Use of GenAI in Learning and Teaching.
- b. Continue to review assessment formats to promote authentic and discipline-appropriate tasks (e.g., oral examinations, source-based analyses, reflective commentaries, team-based learning and research-focused assessments).

A successful implementation of this recommendation will also rely on promoting AI awareness and provide academic integrity guidance within module descriptors and on the School's website, as well as promoting engagement among staff in UCC-provided training and guidance on AI-aware assessment design and marking practices.

This recommendation should be led by a newly established School Learning and Teaching Committee, in conjunction with the Head of School, a reconfigured School's Executive Management Committee and in consultation with the wider staff base.

**9. The Panel recommends that the School develops a physical infrastructural upgrade plan for the School, cognisant of both operational and strategic considerations, with short, medium and long-term implementation details.**

In implementing this recommendation, the School should liaise with Buildings and Estates to carry out necessary upgrades and renovation works, in line with health & safety and accessibility requirements; identify suitable space/s and engaging with the University Strategic Space Utilisation Group to identify a space for a multipurpose social area with food preparation facilities for staff and students to facilitate social mixing and the development of a shared School identity.

This recommendation should be led by the Head of School, in conjunction with a reconfigured School Executive Management Committee and in consultation with the wider staff base.

**10. The Panel recommends that academic staff members at the School increase their engagement with Learning and Teaching programmes as well as Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education (SATLE) offered by the University's Centre for the Integration of Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), as well as availing of Erasmus+ and UNIC staff mobility opportunities.**

The Panel became aware that relatively few School of History's staff have engaged with programmes in T&L offered through CIRTL (approx. 6 for the PG Cert and only 1 to MA level) and only one SATLE grant has been awarded to the School. School engagement with structured T&L is thus lower than would be expected for a unit of its size.

This recommendation should be led by a newly established School Learning and Teaching Committee, in conjunction with the Head of School.

## **Observations**

### **Observations to the University Leadership Team**

In addition to the recommendations, the Panel identified certain observations for consideration, which the Panel believes fall outside of the School's remit. The Panel suggests that these observations be shared with the appropriate functions to agree on a plan for addressing these observations accordingly.

### **School Headships**

The Panel formed an impression that the headship of the School was an unattractive position. The Panel suggests that the University Leadership Team (ULT) may wish to reflect on how school headships in general are accounted for in academic promotion processes, so that they can be made more attractive for prospective applicants eager to realise their leadership talent and strategic vision, without perceived damage to their careers.

### **Library Resources for CACSSS Schools**

The Panel noted that some PGT and PGR students, as well as members of staff, commented on the limited library resources (i.e., books and journals, both hard copy and online) available to

History and History of Art, particularly in comparison to those of other higher education institutions.

The Panel suggests that ULT considers increasing the allocation of funding to the library for resources acquisition to support research in the subject areas to which History and History of Art belong.

### **Observations to College of Arts Celtic Studies and Social Sciences**

The Panel is of the view that the School of History needs the advocacy and support of CACSSS and ULT so that it can seek its prioritisation by the Cork University Foundation and Advancement Office with regards to philanthropic opportunities to fill the vacant Chairs in Irish History and History of Art and, potentially, other academic posts down the line.

## **Overall Analysis of Self-Evaluation Process**

### **Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**

The Panel agrees that the School of History's SEC compiled a well written, comprehensive and interesting SER, which identifies many areas for improvement. It denoted serious and candid engagement with the self-evaluation process, although some weaknesses remained, as discussed below. The Panel also appreciates the fact that the School's SEC identified communication challenges within the School, thanks to the quality review process and committed to address them throughout.

### **Developments since previous Quality Review**

The Panel notes that, while the School was successful in addressing some of the recommendations of the previous Panel Report (2017), some fundamental issues are still unresolved, such as staffing, decline in PGT programme enrolment and financial sustainability of this academic unit. While the SER indicated that a resolution lies fully beyond its own remit and control, the Panel is of the view that the School needs a strong leadership, taking responsibility and becoming proactive in finding innovative and creative solutions, although it acknowledges that advocacy and central support by CACSSS and ULT are also needed.

### **SOAR**

The SOAR session and analysis was conducted in-person by a facilitator within UCC, external to the School of History, as appropriate, and all categories of staff in the School (academic, research and professional services) were invited to, first, contribute to an online feedback exercise on Padlet - a collaborative web platform - and, subsequently, attend the in-person workshop held in September 2025. The session had a good attendance rate.

The SOAR exercise identified clear strengths and shared values (71 altogether, exceeding the entries under the other themes – Opportunities, Aspirations and Results), including excellent

quality of service from admin support personnel and a clear understanding of roles, as well as a vested interest in professional staff development and training.

However, repeated concerns about workload, transparency, staff collegiality and morale, communication and physical infrastructures point to unresolved issues. One of the issues of great significance appeared to be the relationship between the Department of History and the discipline of History of Art, which is regarded as a priority and addressed by one of the SER recommendations by the SEC and also in this Panel Report.

### **Programme Review**

The Programme Review workshop was carried out in October 2025, under the facilitation of Dr Stephen Hammel from the Quality Enhancement Unit. It showed strong external examiner endorsement, positive student feedback and a research-led, connected curriculum, while also highlighting significant risks around staffing and assessment load (e.g., use of AI). Quality of student work, as well as overall programme quality were rated highly, with commendations on the implementing of small group tutorials also. However, assessment distribution, submission dates and staffing issues were highlighted for concern.

### **Stakeholder Surveys**

Three stakeholder surveys – School staff, students and external stakeholders – were administered by the QEU on behalf of the School. In turn, the SEC reflected upon the gathered feedback in the SER report.

Overall, stakeholder feedback confirmed the School's reputation, public engagement and EDI work but also pointed to persistent concerns about communication, governance, facilities and the relationship between History and History of Art (including the School's name). The stakeholder surveys showed a vested interest in increasing and improving communication channels. Surveys highlighted the School's passionate and engaging staff members as well as their professionalism and competence, yet showed concerns for the employability of graduate students.

### **Benchmarking**

The School of History conducted its benchmarking against the University of East Anglia (UEA) and Utrecht University (UU), which were chosen because of their strong academic performance, visibility and programme architecture, as well as structural comparability. Benchmarking highlighted solid undergraduate provision at the UCC's School of History but also exposed weak PGT and PGR recruitment, limited internal research funding and modest international visibility, all of which require more deliberate follow-up. The benchmarking report also showed a gap in career services and support, with UEA having a placement officer on staff. The act of sharing modules across the MA programmes in UEA is a tactic UCC could implement to reduce staff pressure. Overall, selective adoption of practices from the university benchmarked against has the potential for strengthening visibility, programme coherence, employability pathways and PGT recruitment.

### **Good Practice Case Study**

The case study of good practice included in the SER on ‘New Perspectives on the Irish Civil War’ is regarded by the Panel as a very good example of externally funded, interdisciplinary work with clear diversified public reach, nationally and internationally. However, it would benefit from a clearer evaluation framework and a more explicit plan for supporting postgraduate growth, research clustering and long-term research capacity-building. A clearly defined plan for future practice in this initiative model would emphasize the overall benefits of this case study and provide a guideline for future endeavours.

In addition to this, the Panel was impressed by the other good practices in public outreach and research dissemination presented during the site visit, as well as the showcased initiatives to enhance student learning experiences, such as EDI-informed curricular developments. These are recognised in the ‘Commendations’ section of this report.

## **School Overview**

Throughout its site visit, the Panel encountered competent, committed, EDI-minded and student-centred staff with strong disciplinary passions and a commitment to public engagement and national and international dissemination of their research findings. The high degree of student satisfaction is a recognition of that. However, the Panel also found that disciplinary allegiances have detrimentally impacted upon the formation of effective School governance and communication structures, stalling the process of School integration and resulting in fragmentation, duplication, inconsistencies, inefficiencies and considerable communication issues.

In addition to this, the Panel notes that the current higher education landscape is very different from a few decades ago and requires a strong academic entrepreneurial spirit geared towards income-generating activities for maintaining School success and sustainability into the future. As part of this, it identifies the need to urgently address the decline in taught postgraduate programme enrolment, the low internationalisation rate and the impending retirement of staff in the School. The Panel is also aware of the great service to the University that the School is making by securing large numbers of graduates who then move forward into PGT programmes offered elsewhere by UCC. Strategically mapping out, documenting and visualising these trends would be advantageous for the School to provide compelling evidence for their negotiations with the College and University. Finally, the Panel feels strongly about the need to invest in the development of a forward-looking research culture to nurture the next generations of researchers and intellectuals in the disciplines of History and History of Art, in line with a long-established School tradition, which is renowned nationally and internationally.

Staff demonstrated commendable dedication to delivering high quality teaching and maintaining a variety of modules with a broad chronological span, despite the significant workload pressures and subsequent low morale. Infrastructural constraints posed by the fragmentation of the School over three buildings in need of basic maintenance and upgrades were also found to work against greater School integration and social mixing for staff and students.

The Panel found students to be articulate and engaged. Students expressed a strong sense of pride in their School and spoke with enthusiasm about their programmes and lecturers, which aligned with the positive feedback received from employers and other external stakeholders.

External stakeholders expressed appetite for increasing their engagement with the School of History, especially in terms of establishing student work placements and internships; students would be welcomed to carry out History and History of Art research projects for the many locally-based cultural heritage organisations in Cork. This illustrates the existing potential for WIL and vocational developments for the School of History learners going forward. Another important step to increase the employability of School of History graduates was identified in seeking external professional accreditation for the programmes being offered, as well as institutional engagement with the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI), which plays a strategic role in setting the core skills for graduate employment in the national cultural institutions.

The recommendations set out in this Report aim to support the School in building on its considerable strengths while addressing the pressures and constraints that impede strategic development. They are designed to enhance transparency, support effective governance and communication and complete the School integration process. The Panel recommends that the School addresses its governance integration issues with urgency.

The Panel is satisfied that the implementation of these recommendations will enable the School to avert the risks that currently threaten its sustainability, to thrive and to further strengthen its standing in UCC and to the national and international landscape.

## **Facilities**

The Panel undertook a guided tour of the three buildings in which the School of History is based - Perrott Avenue, Silverdale and Tyrconnell. The Panel notes that a number of the staff members they talked with appear to be fond of their School's location and office spaces. However, it expressed its concern at the poor state of the physical infrastructures which appear not fit for purpose, lack accessibility features for Staff and Students with special mobility requirements and are in need of renovation. The Panel also became aware that none of the buildings includes a common space for staff to eat and mix together. Similarly, there are no social spaces for students while the few teaching rooms have capacity only for small seminars. A recommendation in this report addresses in great detail the enhancement interventions that the Panel recommends in terms of both physical infrastructures and staff facilities, including, in the long-term, the future relocation of the whole School in a unique building.

## **Conclusion**

The Panel wishes to thank the staff and students of the School for their openness and constructive engagement throughout the site visit. The collaborative approach taken by the School reflects a strong commitment to continuous improvement and enhancement. The Panel encourages the School and its staff to maintain this positive momentum as they implement the recommendations and continue to work to support the long-term success of the School.

**Next Steps**

The Panel Report will next be presented to the Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC), chaired by the President, and, subject to QEC's approval, will be subsequently published on the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU)'s website.

The School will implement the recommendations within the timeframes outlined and provide a detailed report on their progress via a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP will be considered and approved by the QEC and published on the QEU website.

## Appendix A – Panel Profiles

<p><b>Ms Aimee Cronin</b></p>	<p>Aimee Cronin is the student member for this quality review. She is a final year undergraduate Chemistry student at UCC who joined the student reviewer panel for the 2025/2026 academic year. She will be continuing at UCC following her degree in a master's programme and hopes to work in pharmaceuticals upon completion of her MSc.</p>
<p><b>Associate Professor Caitlin Ellis</b></p>	<p>Dr Caitlin Ellis is Associate Professor of Nordic Medieval History at the University of Oslo. Previously she taught at the universities of Maynooth, Durham, Oxford, East Anglia and Cambridge. She has also held research positions in Reykjavík, Dublin and Stockholm. Her research focuses on medieval Ireland, Britain, Scandinavia and the North Atlantic as well as on the Viking and Norman worlds more broadly. She was trained in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse &amp; Celtic, University of Cambridge.</p>
<p><b>Professor Peter Gray</b></p>	<p>Peter Gray is Professor of Modern Irish History at Queen's University Belfast. He holds a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge and taught at Cambridge and the University of Southampton before joining Queen's in 2005. He was previously Head of School (2010-15) and has been Director of the Institute of Irish Studies since 2016. He is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and has held visiting positions at Boston College, the University of New Brunswick and the University of Melbourne. Since 2024 he has been chair of the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences. He has researched and published widely in 19th-century Irish and British history, with his most recent monograph being <i>William Sharman Crawford and Ulster Radicalism</i> (UCD Press, 2023), which won the 2023 ACIS-J.S. Donnelly Prize for best book on Irish history that year.</p>
<p><b>Professor Andrew James Hopkins</b></p>	<p>Professor Andrew Hopkins FSA is a recognised authority on architecture and urbanism.</p> <p>He has held fellowships at the Guggenheim Venice, Harvard University's Villa I Tatti in Florence, held the Paul Mellon Senior Visiting Fellow at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., did research at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, and was also a Beaufort Fellow at St John's College, Cambridge.</p> <p>Since 2004 he has been a Professor at the University of L'Aquila, Italy, where he currently holds the chair in architectural history. Previously he was the Assistant Director of the British School at Rome.</p>
<p><b>Professor Paul McSweeney (Chair)</b></p>	<p>Professor Paul McSweeney MRIA is Vice-President for Learning and Teaching in University College Cork. His office coordinates the activities of the University's Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), Adult Continuing Education (ACE), Centre for Digital Education, Skills Centre, Examinations Appeals, Careers' Service and the university's Library system and Cork University Press, together with responsibility for delivering aspects of the University's Academic Strategy and strategic plan.</p> <p>Holding a Personal Chair in Food Chemistry, he has an active research profile in dairy chemistry and cheese science. He is the co-author or co-editor of 18 books and numerous research papers and reviews with a h-index of 84 with over 33,000 citations. He was awarded the Marschall Danisco International Dairy Science Award of the American Dairy Science Association in 2004, a higher doctorate (DSc) on published work by the National University of Ireland (2009) and in 2025 was elected to the Royal Irish Academy.</p>

	<p>He is a member of most academic committees in UCC and past chair of its Examinations Appeals Committee and Academic Development and Standards Committee. He is a regular chair of quality enhancement panels in UCC and has participated in quality reviews of academic schools in Ireland and of programmes and HEIs abroad. He is also a member of the Student Experience, Teaching and Learning committee of Ireland's Higher Education Authority which guides the activities of National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.</p> <p>Professor McSweeney has considerable leadership experience in higher education. He was vice-head of school, vice-head of the College of Science, Engineering and Food Science, interim Head of College, a governor of the university (2015-2018) and member of its Finance Committee and head of the School of Food and Nutritional Sciences. He was appointed Vice-President for Learning and Teaching in 2018 and acted as Vice-President for External Relations for five months in 2020.</p>
<p><b>Professor Mohamad Saab</b></p>	<p>Professor Mohamad Saab is based in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at UCC, where he serves as Director of the MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Oncology Nursing. He previously served as Vice Dean of Graduate Studies in the School, where he led and supported several initiatives to enhance the postgraduate research student experience, including piloting the new Progress Review Process and the Graduate Education Manager system as well as establishing the Research Student Buddy System and drafting guidelines for undertaking a PhD in Nursing/Midwifery by publication.</p> <p>An internationally recognised researcher and recipient of four Research and Innovation and Teaching and Learning awards, Professor Saab specialises in the use of emerging technologies – particularly virtual reality, extended reality, and artificial intelligence – to improve cancer awareness, palliative care communication, survivorship support, and nursing and medical education. He has produced over 200 scholarly outputs and secured more than €16 million in competitive research funding. This includes coordinating TRANSCEND-XR, a €6 million Horizon Europe Cancer Mission project designed to improve the quality of life of young cancer survivors.</p> <p>Professor Saab is deeply committed to Quality Enhancement in higher education. He has contributed extensively to curriculum design, programme development, and the integration of simulation and immersive technologies into health professions education. He also served as Academic Council Representative on UCC's Quality Enhancement Committee until 2025 and played an active role in the School of Nursing and Midwifery's quality review process, including site visits, preparation of the self-assessment report, and development of the action plan. He currently serves on numerous School, College, and University committees, as well as national and international research and advisory groups.</p>

## Appendix B – Timetable

### Panel Site Visit to UCC

<b>Wednesday 25 March 2026</b>		
09.00 – 09.15	Convening of Panel members – private meeting <i>Panel agree issues to be explored in forthcoming meetings.</i>	
09.15 – 10.15	Meeting with Head of School (School Manager to join at 10.00) <i>Discussion on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER); what it hopes to gain from the review.</i> <i>Discussion regarding School’s developments to date, strategic priorities, overview of educational provision.</i>	
10.15 – 10.55	Meeting with School Management Team <i>Discussion of management, operational priorities and practices</i>	
10.55 – 11.15	Meeting with Self-Evaluation Committee (SEC) Chair <i>Discussion of SER development; what the School learnt from the process</i>	
11.15 – 11.45	Coffee	
11.45 – 12.30	Meeting with Undergraduate students <i>Discussion of Undergraduate student issues, feedback, interaction with the School</i>	
12.30 – 13.15	Meeting with Postgraduate Taught Students (PGT) <i>Discussion of taught PG student issues, feedback, interaction with the School</i>	Meeting with Postgraduate Research Students (PGR) <i>Discussion of research PG student issues, feedback, interaction with the School</i>
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch	
14.00 – 15.00	Tour of School Facilities (including Silverdale, Tyrconnell and Perrott Ave)	Work Placement Meeting
15.00 – 16.30	Meeting with all staff <i>Discuss issues such as communications, staffing, structures and staff development.</i>	
16.30 – 17.00	Private meeting of Panel	

<b>Thursday 26 March 2026</b>	
09.00 – 09.30	Convening of the Panel – preparation for the day ahead
09.30 – 10.15	Meeting with Head of College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences College Manager, CACSSS Finance Business Manager to join at 10.00 <i>Discussion regarding College strategy and priorities. The links between College/School financial resource allocations process, staffing resources and infrastructure.</i>
10.15 – 11.00	Meeting with Deputy President & Registrar <i>Discussion of UCC's Strategic Plan and Academic Strategy</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.15	Meeting with University Senior Leadership Team Members <i>Discussion on strategy and priorities</i>
12.15 – 12.45	Meeting with Dean of Doctoral Studies <i>Discussion of the University's ambitions for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral education, in line with its Strategic Plan 2023-2028</i>
12.45 – 13.15	Meeting with HR Business Manager, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences <i>Discussion of College/School Human Resources themes/topics</i>
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 14.45	Case Study of Good Practice 'School of History's Outreach and Public Engagement through Research' 'Mapping the Irish Civil War Project, 2022-2024' 'Ireland and the birth of Europe DFA Exhibition' 'Gender and Public Health History' 'Research and Social Engagement' <i>Opportunity for the School to showcase good practice and enhancements to the student learning experience, public engagement, and School profile with a focus on the Case Study of Good Practice</i>
14.45 – 15.30	Meeting with Programme Directors <i>Discussion on programme quality assurance, governance, delivery and assessment</i>
15.30 – 16.15	Enhancing the Student Learning Experience 'Using Team-based learning to enhance the student experience' 'Integrating, Familiarising and Defamiliarising LGBT history in the curriculum' <i>Discussion on programme enhancements to student learning experience including CPD, undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students</i>

**Thursday 26 March 2026**

16.15 – 17.00	Private meeting of Panel <i>Summative meeting to discuss key emerging themes and topics of importance for report</i>
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**Online meetings – second week****Monday 30 March 2026**

09.30 – 09.45	Convening of the Panel – preparation for the day ahead
<b>Teams</b> 09.45 – 10.30	Meeting with External Stakeholders <i>Discussion of external stakeholders' views and experiences of the School</i>
10.30 – 11.30	Panel meeting to draft the recommendations and commendations
11.30 – 12.00	Break for Panel
12.00 – 13.30	Panel meeting to draft the recommendations and commendations

**Wednesday 1 April 2026**

09.30 – 10.30	Meeting of Panel to finalise recommendations and commendations
10.30 – 11.00	Meeting with Head of School, and Head of College of College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences <i>Clarification and discussions of main findings by Panel</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Break for Panel
11.30 – 12.30	Panel meeting to discuss feedback from Head of Unit; consider the closing presentation
12.30 – 13.00	Panel Closing Presentation (Teams) <i>Closing presentation to all staff, to be made by the Chair or other member(s) of Panel as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Panel.</i>
13.00 – 13.30	Panel – wrap up meeting