

**Report Of The External Panel Into The Self-Study
Report, Reviewing Programmes And Operations In The
School Of Informatics, Music And Creative Media,
Dundalk Institute of Technology.**

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Membership of the External Panel.....	4
3.	Process of the External Panel Review	4
4.	Schedule	5
5.	General issues, School Structure and the Implementation of the Strategic Plan...	6
6.	Discussion on the internal operations of the School and the outcomes of the programmes	7
6.1.	Research activities	7
6.2.	Recruitment of students	8
6.3.	Retention of students	8
6.4.	Quality assurance processes	9
6.5.	General issues	10
7.	Meeting with Researchers	10
8.	Meeting with Learners.....	11
9.	Meeting with Staff of Music and Creative Media Department.....	12
10.	Meeting with Staff of Computing and Maths Department	13
11.	Conclusion	14
11.1.	General Comments	14
11.2.	Quality Assurance Processes	16
11.3.	The Review Process and Documentation	16
11.4.	Academic Plans and Engagement with Strategic Plan of the Institute	17
11.5.	Revalidation of Programmes	17
	Appendix A	19
	Appendix B.....	19
	Appendix C	19

1. Introduction

The Academic Council of Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) requested the School of Informatics, Music and Creative Media to review its activities over the past five years (2003-2008). As part of this review the school was required to conduct a self-study of its activities under the following general headings.

- Requirements under delegation of authority to make awards and a re-evaluation of those requirements
- Review of programmes, facilities, outcomes and the operation of the School since the last programmatic review
- Plans for the next five years and responses to National and Institutional strategic initiatives
- Proposed minor changes to programmes

The Academic Council suggested a template for the review as a guide to the School. This template indicated in detail the expected content of the review.

The school produced a self-study report, which covered the questions raised above and which also covered other issues which the school felt warranted consideration and attention. The Institute also provided standard figures indicating recruitment, retention and graduation statistics.

The Academic Council required that the self study be reviewed by an external review panel and that the panel should report to the academic council on the adequacy of the report and on any other issues which it might consider pertinent.

The review panel consisted of the seven external members and the Registrar of the Institute. The Registrar provided secretarial support to the panel and also advice on Institute policy. The external members took all decisions of the panel.

The panel met the President, Mr. Denis Cummins and the Head of School, Dr Gerard McKiernan and the Heads of Department and Programmes to discuss the position of the school within the Institute, the management arrangements for the school and the strategic plans for the Institute and their linkages with the plans for the school.

It met Heads of Department as well as senior academic members of the staff to discuss the review process within the school, the substance of the report, the student statistics, the quality assurance processes and the plans for the future.

A session was held with learners where issues about the quality of delivery, contact with staff and quality of services were discussed.

The academic staff from each department was available to discuss the review process and the detailed changes to the programmes. This session also covered the operation of the quality assurance processes, the approach to teaching and learning and the extent to which the staff were engaged with the review process.

The detailed changes to programme schedules and the processes by which they were proposed were examined by the panel.

2. Membership of the External Panel

Name	Institute
Mr. Terry Twomey	Registrar, Limerick Institute of Technology, Chairman
Ms Helen Doherty	School of Creative Arts, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Professor Ronan Reilly	Department of Computer Science, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Dr Brian Nolan	Head of Department of Informatics, Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
Mr. Brian Carty	Ph.D. Student, Department of Music, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Professor Desmond Hunter	Director of Centre for Higher Education Practice Department of Music, University of Ulster
Mr. Stephen Mc Manus	Registrar, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Secretary

Mr Brendan Murray of IBM Technology Campus, had agreed to participate in the review but unfortunately could not attend at the last minute.

3. Process of the External Panel Review

The panel was provided with an extensive self study report by the school. Details of changes to the programme schedules and the rationale for those changes were available. An extensive list of additional material was also available to the panel for consideration. This included minutes of all referenced meetings, staff CVs, current and proposed schedules and overviews of reasons for changes to programmes within the two departments. Finally the programme documents were available to the panel on a memory stick.

The panel visit was arranged over two days and according to the following programme/sessions. The panel engaged the School staff in general discussions on relevant topics arising from the documentation provided. Certain issues were discussed in detail and in depth.

4. Schedule

Monday 6th October 2008 – Crowne Plaza Hotel

Session A 18:00 Private meeting of panel

Session B: 19.00 -19.45 Meeting with President, Head of School

Topic: Strategic position of the school within the Institute, linkage to the Institute Strategic Plan, resources available to the school, organisational structure of the school.

Session C: 19.45- 20.30 Meeting with Head of School, Heads of Department and Programmes.

Topic: The general activities of the school, the process of producing the self study report and resource issues, plans

Tuesday 7th October 2008

Session D: 08.45- 09.30 Private meeting of the panel.

Session E: 09.30 – 10.45 Meeting with Heads of School and Department and the self study steering committee.

Topics: Intake on programmes, outcomes, access and retention issues, quantity and quality of staff input.

Session F: 11.00-11.45 Meeting with research staff

Topics: Development of research activities, facilities and processes, dissemination of research results.

Session G: 11.45- 12.30 Meeting with learners

Topic: Delivery of programmes, adequacy of facilities, student representational issues, general view of the School and the Institute.

Lunch 12.30- 13.30

Session H 13.30 – 15.00 Meeting with Academic and Support staff

Department of Music and Creative Media
Slievefoye Seminar Room, Library

Department of Computing and Mathematics Business Studies Seminar Room

Topic: Operation of quality assurance processes, staff development, facilities, the review process.

Session I: 15.00- 16.30

Meeting with Academic and Support staff.

Department of Music and Creative Media

Slievefoye Seminar Room, Library

Department of Computing and Mathematics

Business Studies Seminar Room

Topic: Revalidation of programmes.

Session J: 16.30-17.15

Private meeting of the Panel

Topic: Formulation of general conclusions and recommendations.

Session K: 17.15- 17.30

Meeting with President and Head of School

Topic: Verbal Report to Head of School.

5. General issues, School Structure and the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

To discuss these issues the panel was met by the President, Mr Denis Cummins and the Head of School Dr Gerard Bob McKiernan. The position of the School in the Institute was discussed. The School was created in 2004 by the amalgamation of the Department of Computing and Mathematics and the creation of a new Department of Music and Creative Media.

The Department of Computing had been established in the 1980s and had grown strongly in the 1990s. Recently it had suffered a decline in applications. It had responded to this by moving from undergraduate training to research activities. The Department was physically dispersed throughout the existing building.

The Department of Music and Creative Media was established in 2004. The music part of this is currently located in the town campus. There is high demand for its programmes and much of the teaching is delivered by contract staff.

The president agreed that the present accommodation of the school was not ideal. He said that the Institute had procured €37 million for the refurbishment of the old Carroll's factory. This would accommodate 950 students with full academic, support and administrative facilities. It was intended that the School of Informatics, Music and Creative Media (IMCM) would relocate to that facility. This move was planned for the end of 2009 or early 2010. This accommodation would give the school facilities to allow it to fulfil the

demand for additional informatics graduates which the state was demanding. It would also put the school in one location which would allow the further development of interdisciplinary programmes and activities. The current staffing in computing with a staff: student ratio of 1:10 gives the Department of Computing and Mathematics scope for expansion. The issue is not numbers of staff but the distribution of skills. The staff development programme was supporting those staff who wished to gain research qualifications and a number of staff in Computing had completed Ph.Ds and others were pursuing them.

On expansion the President said that the demand at present was for programmes in the Creative Media area and that new appointments were being made in that area. The school had been given two new appointments. It might be necessary to redirect staff into these areas.

On strategic issues, the move towards a greater emphasis on learning rather than teaching was a major objective of the Institute. A new Head of Teaching and Learning had been appointed and his initial task was to work with staff to strengthen their skills. Student involvement is also encouraged. Interdisciplinary programmes were being developed. The Multimedia and Music programmes were examples of programmes with roots in different disciplines. The research agenda had been recently bolstered by the appointment of a new Head of Research. The research areas the Institute was concentrating on were in Software Technologies, Ageing and Health, Entrepreneurship and Renewable Energy. On the issue of critical mass, the President mentioned that there were 19 post-graduate research students. All of the students had joined from in-house undergraduate programmes. The Level 9 programme was taught entirely by DkIT staff. Most modules were delivered by staff bringing their research experience directly to bear on the material delivered.

6. Discussion on the internal operations of the School and the outcomes of the programmes

The panel met with the Heads of School, Departments and Programmes to discuss the self study report and the academic processes within the School. The staff present were: Dr Gerard Bob McKiernan, Prof. Dr Christian Horn, Ms Caroline O Sullivan and Ms Adele Commins.

6.1. Research activities

The development of research activities and its impact on the school was discussed. There were different positions in the different departments. In the Computing department, research had become embedded in the normal operations of the programmes. The decrease in undergraduate provision had been compensated by the increase in research activities. This process had been nurtured by internal strategies and processes. The researchers tended to be younger than the average academic staff.

There has not been a parallel development within the Creative Media area. Lack of staff meant that their attention and energies were concentrated on the development of undergraduate programmes. Most staff had been working over-hours for the last few years establishing programmes. In some cases seed funds, which had been allocated to these staff, could not be used. It was hoped that the new head of research would allow these matters to be addressed.

The matter of dissemination of research results was also discussed. Most of the publications were conference papers. It was pointed out that SFI tended to discount these. At this stage the school should be making a determined effort to get results published in peer-reviewed journals.

6.2. Recruitment of students

The issues arising around the recruitment of students were strikingly different in the three discipline areas.

In the case of Computing programmes, the capacity of the department exceeds the demand for places. Consequently the department is recruiting students from a wide ability range. Very many students are the first generation of their families to attend a Higher Education programme. Both of these factors lead to difficulties in students engaging productively with the programmes. Those students recruited in Ireland were predominantly male and from the immediate region. The department also had a larger proportion of EU and international students. This diversity was welcome but did add to the complexity of delivering effective programmes.

Music also offered places to all qualified applicants. In this case the students tended to be very well motivated and academically qualified. The pre-admission audition was an effective filter. The students of music came from all over the country as the number of directly competing programmes was not high. The gender distribution was more balanced than that in Computing.

Creative Media programmes also had a healthy demand and places were consequently limited. Students in the main were academically able for the programmes but the programmes did suffer some drop-outs in first year. Staff shortages rather than applicant shortages were the issue in this area

6.3. Retention of students

The Institute had provided standard statistics on the retention of students and on the level of staff input and output. The School had comprehensively and openly analysed the throughput over the period since the last review. Again each section of the school showed different issues.

The figures for the Level 8 Music programmes showed that 'drop outs' occurred mainly in the first year and that thereafter the loss of students was very low. In music the students tend to be academically able and well motivated. The strong internal culture of the discipline assists in the integration of students into the programmes. Once successfully integrated the students tend to thrive.

The process of integrating students in Music was described. Each student was assigned a Director of Study. Each Director of Study was responsible for nine students. This staff member monitored students' progress through the programme. The nature of the programme meant that students were performing with their class mates almost immediately. These performances also included students from previous years' intakes. Thus students were quickly inducted into a 'community of practice'. The Director of Study was able to act as a link with the department and, by the nature of the activity, was able to monitor the progress of his/her charges regularly.

There was a similar situation in the Creative Media. In this area the students are academically capable but may not have the level of motivation on entry that the music students show. However, the figures for these programmes show that the retention of students is not a problem.

The Computing level 8 programmes, mostly one year post level 7 programmes, had a retention rate in line with norms. It is notable that all of the research students recruited into the department came from the undergraduates programme and have been retained successfully on the programme.

There are difficulties with the level 7 programmes in Computing. The retention rates quoted in the documentation are low, in some cases they are less than 30%. Staff felt that this was in line with national trends. However no information was available about comparative figures from other Institutions. A retention officer had been appointed to assist students and he conducted exit interviews. Panel members quoted other departments with an 80% retention rate in first year. Staff indicated that recent changes in intake policy and the common entry point should ameliorate the problem. Panel members felt that there was a real structural and process problem with the first year experience, which needs to be addressed. The Meitheal process in the Electronics Department was seen as one approach which broke with traditional methods and might deliver results.

6.4. Quality assurance processes

The operation of the quality assurance processes within the school differed depending on the section involved. The Institutionally designed programme boards worked well in those areas, with coherent and cohesive programmes. Where the programmes were modularised and different pathways were available to students, the structure of programme and stage boards were less effective. The structural diagram of the school, showing the communication and control links, could be reformed to ensure clarity of control and responsibility.

Programme and stage coordinators are not a feature in the School and this makes the operation of quality assurance procedures difficult. There seems to be adequate staff resources in the school to allow the appointment of programme coordinators. This is an issue which needs attention urgently. The panel stressed that course coordination had a very positive impact on the learning experience of students and should be considered as an investment. The movement of resources from direct teaching to course coordination should be a priority for the school.

Programme reviews occurred annually and were carried out by programme boards. These reported to the Academic Council and reviewed outcomes and external examiners reports. They also ensured that the feedback process from students was carried out. Where these reports were useful, some felt that the response from the Academic Council was lacking, in particular to requests for additional resources.

Students were on programme boards in the Creative Media and in the Music areas. The position of students was not formalised in Computing.

There were very few formal reviews of students' marks. As a review is a full re-mark of the paper by an external examiner, most of these issues are dealt with at the consultations which are available to students following the publishing of provisional results.

6.5. General issues

The staff were asked to indicate what they felt were the general issues which affected them in the running of the department. The dispersed nature of the department of Computing was an issue leading to fragmentation among the staff. It also meant that there was no natural 'home' for the students. Another pressing issue was the issue of course coordination, which was a general issue across the Institute. Most felt that this was a key issue to be addressed. Some specialist technical facilities were limited – the dark room was mentioned in this regard. The technical support which had been centralised recently was seen to have dis-improved. Disconnection between services was an irritant at times.

Access to buildings for research students and staff was a problem. As performance was a feature of the Music programme, the availability of opportunities and venues for public performances were something which could be improved.

7. Meeting with Researchers

The panel was informed of the strong development of research activities during the past five years. There were no metrics available on research but the emphasis in the recent past was on buying out research time. Activity was increasing with more and more staff getting involved. The research activity was confined to Computing and to Music.

A notable feature of the research training activity was that in Computing all students were successful so far and all had come from undergraduate programmes. The department was moving to graduate its first Ph.D. in the near future.

The employment of post doctoral staff was evidence that research was embedding itself in the school. One suggestion was that the institute should make provision for research activity based on a retrospective view of the staff rather than on planned specified actions.

The level of staff training in research was adequate, with a number of staff having been awarded doctorates and a number in process.

8. Meeting with Learners

The panel met with a number of learners. The group consisted of students from each department and discipline area. It also included post graduate and undergraduate learners.

The students felt that they had a good relationship with their lecturers. Peer contact is also good, especially on Creative Media and Music programmes. There were mixed feelings about the effectiveness of the class representative system. Some students felt that it works, while others did not.

When asked why they thought other students had failed or dropped out most felt that those students had made poor programme choices or had not engaged fully with the programme. Some students arrived late on the programme. They suggested that the information in the admissions handbook did not sufficiently prepare some students for the programme.

The students were enthusiastic about the Learning Support Centre and felt that it was a good way of delivering detailed support to students. This is a HEA supported initiative to support retention on ICT programmes. Students felt that there was an open door policy for them and that in the main lecturers were approachable. However some felt that academic staff were slow to respond to complaints. They were not aware of the formal complaint system. There were mixed feelings about the use of continuous assessment rather than final examinations. The Creative Media and Music students were given an assessment schedule at the beginning of the semester. This was not then practice in Computing. Students reported a lack of informal working spaces in the department and in some cases, difficulty in accessing equipment. Awareness of non- academic student services was limited.

Students agreed that part time work was a normal and necessary part of their lives as students.

9. Meeting with Staff of Music and Creative Media Department

Members of the panel including Helen Doherty, Brian Carty, Professor Hunter and Stephen McManus met with the staff of the Department of Music and Creative Media. This department was one of the youngest in the Institute and contained many new staff.

The staff were open and vocal in their contribution to the process. It was evident to the panel that there were high levels of enthusiasm, energy and commitment amongst the staff. Most of the programmes were relatively new and had recently been validated or revalidated through the semesterisation process. The staff felt that first of all they were offering a service to the region and that also the specialities in Traditional Music and Music Technology matched anything available nationally.

The staff felt that they were fully involved in the programmatic review and were given the opportunity to contribute. Their focus was on the review of the programmes and the outcomes from the programmes. They did not get an opportunity to look at other sister departments or programmes in other institutions. Academic contacts with other institutions were through external examiners and through informal, unplanned contacts. The external examining process was a useful and productive one and externs were present for the exhibitions and performances. All continuous assessment material was available to the externs. Some felt that the module descriptors used by the Institute were too restrictive.

The staff were asked to what extent they had engaged with the strategic objectives of the Institute. On the move from a teaching to a learning environment, the staff of the Creative Media area emphasised that much of their delivery was in the form of team teaching and learning. Students are working with their peers in joint projects and were assessing their peers. Another surprising aspect of the Creative Media programme was the extent to which the students were early adaptors of emerging techniques and technologies. Often they introduced technical innovations and new software tools to their peers and thus engaged in peer teaching. Feedback to students happens on an ongoing basis and often in the context of ongoing learning activities. In the Music programmes the performance sessions were complex sites of peer group activity, expert teaching, peer and expert assessment and continual feedback. It also acted as a community of practice. Some sessions, including individual performances and instruction, were recorded and/or videoed.

The Strategic Plan envisaged a development of interdisciplinary activity in the Institute. Staff indicated that their programmes welcomed imports from other disciplines and they had successfully imported engineering and computing expertise into their programmes. There was co-operation within the school. Many modules in Creative Media were shared with programmes in the Humanities department.

There was little formal contact with the creative industries and the output of graduates was so recent that it was difficult to use them as reliable indicators of the effectiveness of the programme. However, in Music the web of contacts with other institutions through external examining duties and other peer assessment processes was rich and embedded the staff in DkIT firmly within the music education community on the island.

10. Meeting with Staff of Computing and Maths Department

In describing the review process the staff indicated the major themes or initiatives which had happened since the last review. They felt that the existing programmes were more student focused and group teaching had assisted in this. The review of the assessments had led to an increase in the number of subjects being assessed through continuous assessment alone and a rebalancing of the assessment methods in other modules.

The panel questioned the failure rate of 1st years and the retention problem within the Department. Up on two thirds of the Department students were either failing or leaving which presented a real problem particularly in Stage 1, Semester 1. The academic staff concentrated on the quality of students as reasons for this. They mentioned the poor academic achievements of students in the Leaving Certificate especially in mathematics, the socio-economic background of students, and the additional problems associated with international students. They also suggested that recent institute-wide changes including semesterisation and the rescheduling of examinations before Christmas contributed to this problem. Other issues mentioned included service teaching, budgetary and timetable constraints.

There was unhappiness expressed by some staff over the quality of physical facilities. This included staff and class rooms and space for the staff to meet with students. They felt that improvements were parked until the school moved to their new facilities. The evident low morale amongst some staff was attributed in part to the dispersed nature of the department and the frequent changes in School and Department management over the recent past. They also mentioned lack of staff development activities.

However the staff agreed that there had been welcome and effective initiatives. The common 1st year on the level 7 programmes was definitely working; the Panel suggested that it could possibly be rolled out to Level 8s. The introduction of Study Skills modules, guest speakers and simulation equipment also improved programmes. The Learning Support Centre is also a valuable supplement to the academic programmes.

The early and extensive adoption by staff of electronic delivery systems was a feature of the department and an indication of the willingness of staff to adapt to new processes.

The Panel encouraged staff to examine the high level of teaching hours and the re-direction of these hours into projects such as mentoring, peer projects, etc. The issue of

course coordination was revisited with the panel stressing the need for this academic activity to be seen as a valuable part of the programme undertaken by academic staff.

The panel has no issues with the majority of programmes presented for validation outside of a general concern of the apparent policy to concentrate on increased levels of teaching.

The M.Sc. in Computing was now running independently from Tralee. The panel felt that it should be revalidated but could be strengthened by the inclusion of new specialist modules.

11. Conclusion

11.1. General Comments

The panel would like to thank the school for the open and frank way in which they have responded to the panel's sometimes probing questions. The self study was thorough and comprehensive and covered all of the pertinent activities of the school. The panel is happy to report to the Academic Council that the School has fulfilled its tasks in this regard and has commented below on the specific questions put to it.

The school consists of two distinct departments and there are different internal conditions operating in each area. Also the external environment, and demand for the services of each department is different. This produces a set of circumstances in each department which is unique, and the issues faced by each department is similarly unique.

The growth plans for the school are ambitious, and were constructed without the resource constraints which are now operating in the sector. However, the move to the new facility in Carrols does offer a once-off opportunity to address many of the issues which have arisen.

The new Department of Music and Creative Media has embraced the teaching and learning agenda of the Institute with enthusiasm. There is evidently a strong understanding of the philosophy and pedagogy of the integration of teaching and learning. It is evident in both parts of the department that there is a good methodology of engagement with the student community. There is a strong sense of collegiality within the particular discipline areas of the department, evidenced by the culture of peer review of assessments and high commitment to teaching. The department is bolstered by high demand for its programmes and their distinctive nature, which leads to high motivation among its students.

A key element in the department is the individual support given to performance training. It is important that this is maintained by the institute.

Research has not developed as yet out of the Creative Media programmes. The Institute should consider providing some 'protected time' and facilities for staff in this area for these activities.

The Department of Computing and Mathematics is in a different position to its sister department. Having grown strongly in the late nineties, it has suffered a sharp decrease in demand for its programmes. The programmes are facing considerable difficulties in retaining students. Staff are well aware of this problem and have analysed it openly. There is a feeling that these difficulties can be laid at the feet of the low demand from applicants, inadequate motivation and academic preparation of students. Staff are located in various parts of the building. This does not lead to a cohesive approach or to efficient communications. The frequent changes of Head of Department in the last five years have not contributed to a cohesive or sustained approach to the difficulties faced by the department. The physical facilities are not conducive to engagement by students.

These factors have led to a loss of energy of the staff. The review process, which should have re-energised them, did not do so. The department is in the fortunate position that the move to the new facilities provides an opportunity to address some of these issues.

The panel would recommend that the move to Carroll's be used as a context within which some important issues should be addressed. This move should be formally planned, with attention paid to the physical distribution of staff and the need to develop genuine team spirit. Space for the staff to interact informally with students would be a desirable addition.

The communication structures and the quality assurance system should be overhauled to be closer to what is required. This should emphasise clarity of function of the various groups, and on the communication links with the management and the academic council. The role of the course coordinators is vital in this and their absence is a real deficit.

It is particularly important that programme organisers or coordinators be appointed, and that they are given the responsibilities which are usual in other institutions. This gap in the organisation of the school is unsustainable.

The retention difficulties faced by the department are shared by sister departments in other institutes. The scale of the problem is different and would appear to be greater in Dundalk. The department should urgently benchmark itself against other Computing departments with regard to delivery, assessment and retention of undergraduate students. It should reconsider its first year programme in light of that exercise in time for the intake of 2009.

The department has allocated considerable resources to formal delivery of classes. The weekly hours would appear to be out-of-line with the sectoral norms and this strategy has not delivered in improved retention of students. This expenditure does not allow the department to provide adequate academic support or programme coordination services. It may also have contributed to the de-motivation of some students. The Computing programme schedules should be recast with a maximum weekly scheduled contact of 24 hours in Stage 1. This should be reduced to a figure of less than 20 hours per week for Stage 4, reflecting the increased independence of the learners and the move from teaching

to learning. Some of the resources released by this move could be utilised in the expansion of the Learning Centre, which provides an academic referral service to students.

Most Institutes have a system of course coordination undertaken by academic staff. This is a deficiency in Dundalk. The matter should be addressed urgently. The resources released in the reforms outlined above should be used in part to put a system of course co-ordination in place.

The department has made great strides in the development of its research activities. The successful training of its own graduates on postgraduate research programmes is a strong indication of the quality of those who graduate from the department. The acquisition of research qualifications by staff is an indication of eagerness and of potential within the department. This enthusiasm is a valuable resource and should be preserved.

The panel was tasked by the Academic Council with answering the questions put to it in section 1 on page 4.

11.2. Quality Assurance Processes

The quality assurance procedures relating to the assessment of learners is operating successfully, as are the validation processes. The review and recheck system is used by students sparingly, but this is explained by a comprehensive consultation system which is operated by the school immediately following the issuing of the results. Ongoing oversight of the programme is achieved by the annual programme review. This is not seen as totally effective and the Academic Council should consider how it might be improved. Student involvement in the programme boards has only been achieved in part and where informal processes are in place these should be formalised. The school is conscious of the limitations of the stage/programme board structure in a modularised system. The Academic Council should reconsider these issues on the occasion of the Institutional review.

11.3. The Review Process and Documentation

The panel is satisfied that the review process engaged fully with the appropriate issues. There is evidence of extensive consultation with and input from the academic staff. Extensive documentation was received and many of the pertinent issues were explored. The review was open about the problems faced by the school and also celebrated the successes of the school. The documentation showed an extensive analysis of the outcomes from the programmes in the school. The school did not take the opportunity to benchmark itself against other sister schools, this would have counteracted a tendency to be introverted. Also the operation did not engage very successfully with broad national issues, of competition with other institutions of broad changes to Higher Education. The nature of the process probably does not allow for the academic community to deal with these types of issues simultaneously and successfully.

11.4. Academic Plans and Engagement with Strategic Plan of the Institute

The plans for the school envisage considerable expansion in numbers of students and in programmes. It is in line with the institute's ambitious targets for overall numbers. It also seeks to make use of the new facilities in the Carroll's building. It is line also with the institute's strategic aim of increasing the amount of inter-disciplinary activity and of research. It was conceived in a period of continuing economic optimism. Not only is it not clear where the additional students will come from but existing staff constraints and limits on other resources make implementation of the plan unfeasible. In the medium terms it remains aspirational. Given resources these plans represent a positive pathway for the school.

The school has engaged with the strategic plan of the institute in a number of ways. The development of research activities is in line with a major target of the plan. The level of research and research training in computing and in music is a real strength for the Institute. The lack of development of research in the creative media area is understandable given the undergraduate programme development activities. However the school should attempt to create some space for research in this area.

The school has also exemplified a move towards an inter-disciplinarity which is also in line with the strategic aims of the institute. The school was successful in utilising engineering skills on its music programmes and computing modules on its BA in Creative Multimedia programme. The capacity and willingness to design programmes drawing on different disciplines is a strength which the School should husband.

The move to learning rather than a teaching environment is a major strategic aim of the institute. It is obvious that the new programmes in Music and in Creative Media embody a rich learning environment for well motivated and able students. The nature of the delivery and learning processes in these disciplines lend themselves easily to peer assessment and peer teaching and also to genuine learner involvement in programme delivery.

The Computing programmes remain in a mode of delivery which emphasises the traditional teaching over learning. Although the Computing staff have enthusiastically adapted to electronic delivery modes, the class and laboratory based modes of delivery are very traditional. The benchmarking process mentioned above should provide a context in which this could be reviewed.

11.5. Revalidation of Programmes

The panel is satisfied that the programmes outcomes and structure are fit for purpose and are confident that the changes proposed are appropriate. The panel is prepared to recommend to the Academic Council that the programmes as presented in appendix C be validated for intakes in 2009 till 2013 or until the next programmatic review whichever is the sooner. In the case of computing this is conditional upon the reformulation of the programme schedules to reduce formal scheduled contact time as suggested in 11.1 and the benchmarking of the first year experience against best practice in sister departments. It

also accepts that the school should implement suitable changes to current programmes consistent with those proposed in the revalidated versions.

Mr Terry Twomey, Chairman

Ends

Appendix A

List of internal participants.

Appendix B

Appendix C