University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

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School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science

April 2020

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1. Introduction

This Report responds to the findings of the Internal Periodic Quality Review of the UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science (SBBS), which included a site visit by the Review Group in February 2019.

The Review Group visited the School from 18 - 21 February 2019 and had meetings with School staff, University students and staff, including: the Head of School; College Principal; SAR Co-ordinating Committee; School faculty, School support staff; employers of graduates; postgraduate students, taught and research; recent graduates; undergraduate students.

Following receipt of the review group report in July 2019, the School have been involved in responding to the recommendations and developing their Quality Improvement Plan. Feedback to the School on the plan was received via the UCD Quality office from the Review Group Chair. Following acceptance by the Chair, the report was finalised and circulated, for consideration by the University Management Team (UMT), in April 2020.

In what follows the Review Group recommendations are listed, with the paragraph reference from their report. Then there is a category number (1, 2 or 3), indicating the following:

Categories
1. Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit
2. Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit
3. Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require additional recurrent or capital funding

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
			Organisation and Management			
2.11	Although the roles of the School's committees are generally understood, those roles would benefit from much clearer articulation than was presented in the SAR. The processes of reviewing and clarifying the remit of each committee will improve the performance of each committee and will help the School to identify gaps in its procedures.	1	The School will prepare terms of reference for each of the School's committees	Head of School / Executive Committee	1 February 2020	1 June 2020
2.12	The School should schedule periodic reviews of the effectiveness of each committee in delivering its remit and in communicating its findings and recommendations to School members.	1	The School will organise a yearly review of the main overarching committees (Teaching & Learning Committee, Executive Committee, MSc Management Committee). The other committees report to the T&L, MSc Management Committee and the Executive Committee, and hence are subject to an implicit continuous review of their effectiveness. The Executive Committee, Teaching & Learning Committee, MSc Management Committee, Graduate Studies Committee, Research, Innovation & Impact Committee and the Administrative and Technical Teams report to School members at our School meetings which take place twice in the first and second trimester.	Head of School / Executive Committee	1 February	1 September 2020
2.13	The School's Executive	1	This is current practice; all members of staff have	Head of School	Current	Current

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	Committee should maintain active oversight of the membership of School committees, ensuring that all members of staff have an opportunity to serve on committees should they wish to.		the opportunity to serve on committees and take on leadership roles in the School.		practice	practice
2.14	Given its size, the School might consider whether benefits would accrue from the creation of a Finance Committee, under the Head of School, or whether the responsibility for School finances should be shared by the Executive Committee.	1	The School has considered this and is of the opinion that a formal Finance Committee would not provide additional benefits to the current practice in which the Head of School provides transparency of School expenditure to and seeks advice from the Executive Committee. The creation of a finance committee will be reconsidered when the successor of the current Head of School takes over.	Head of School	N/A	N/A
			Staff and Facilities			
3.12	The School needs to be more proactive in ensuring that the University addresses what it identifies as inefficiencies caused by, and disadvantages created by, the scattered location of its spaces, whether they be for research, teaching, or administration. Its suggested medium-term solution – that space be consolidated in two locations, the Science Centre and the Conway Institute	1/2	The School wholeheartedly agrees with the Review Group. The scattered location of the School as well as the lack of control/influence over the allocation of office and laboratory space occupied by the School has been highlighted by the School since its foundation, including during the previous Quality Review in 2009. The School sees opportunities in the Development of Science West and North as part of phase III of the Science Centre Development.	Head of School	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	Building – should be communicated to the University Management Team (UMT) alongside a clear articulation of the problems created by the current distribution of spaces.					
3.13	The School should consider preparing in consultation with the School of Biology and Environmental Science, a document for UMT, in which the considerable strategic benefits of co-location to both schools, and indeed to the College of Science, are clearly identified.	1	The School has reached out to the Head of School of SBES to discuss the benefits and co-location of both Schools in particular when resources can be shared, such as a UCD imaging unit to be located in Science Centre North or West

. | Head of School | 1 December 2019 | 1 June 2020 |
| **3.14** | The School has no direct role in the governance of the Conway Institute; however, given that its activities contribute so significantly to the Institute's reputation, a case for a role is very strong, it should articulate to UMT its argument for a role in the governance of the Institute. | 1/2 | The School agrees with the Review Group that it is desirable that Schools including SBBS are directly involved in governance of the Conway Institute and will make this case to UMT. | Head of School | 1 February 2020 | 1 June 2020 |
| **3.15** | In consultation with the College Principal and the UMT, the School should engage directly with the Director of the Conway | 1/2 | The Head of School has engaged with the Director of the Conway Institute to resolve problems in relation to allocation of research and office space. The School is of the opinion that research and | Head of School | Completed | Completed |

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	Institute to resolve any problems of delay in the allocation of research and office space in the Institute.		office space allocation should be centrally managed rather than at institute level.			
3.16	Given that there are no 'calls' in the new promotion system, the School should be systematic in reminding faculty that they can apply for promotion at any point. In encouraging staff to avail of the new system, the School's senior faculty should, in line with the School's commitment to the Athena Swan Charter, be cognisant of the gender imbalance at senior levels.	1	The School regularly reminds staff that applications for promotion can be made at any time. This occurs at School meetings, during P4G meetings and in individual conversations between staff and the Head of School. The School is cognisant of a gender imbalance at Professorial (3F & 6M) and Full Professorial level (1F & 2.5M) but notes that there are more female than male Associate Professors (7F & 4M). The School therefore expects that gender balance at senior faculty levels will be achieved in the next five years. We note that promotion is not within the remit of the School.	Head of School	Ongoing	Ongoing
3.17	In addition to its engagement with the University's pilot programme supporting newly appointed faculty, the School should review how it provides bespoke mentorship to its own Early Career Researchers, including, but not limited to, postdoctoral researchers, to ensure that they are provided with guidance and opportunities in a context that is consistent, structured and transparent.	1	The School will initiate a review to explore how best to provide bespoke mentorship to the School early Career Researchers. **Postdoctoral fellows:** We note that Postdoctoral Fellows engage in the UCD induction programme for Postdoctoral Fellows, which is detailed on page 12 of the Self-Assessment Report **Newly appointed Faculty:** Mentorship for new faculty is part of the *Newly Assistant Professor Development Programme* which was piloted by College of Science and the College of Social Science & Law but has now been adopted by UCD.	Head of School	1 February 2020	1 June 2020

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3.18	The School might consider how, working under the umbrella of the Athena Swan application and recognising that their administrative support staff which is entirely female, it might advocate within the University, for a promotional structure that properly rewards a valuable cohort in its community.	2	The administrative staff is not entirely female (composition: 1 EA [vacant], 2 SEA [F], 2 AO II [1F, 1M] 1 AO I [F].

The recently implemented UCD Job Sizing Framework allows promotion of administrative staff without competition to recognise that a role of incumbent staff has grown. | Head of School, School Manager | N/A | N/A |
| **3.19** | The School and the University in general, should consider how long-term staff in professional service roles are provided with the opportunity to expand and develop their roles. | 1/2 | This is current practice and is a standing item on the agenda of the weekly meeting of the Head of School, School Manager and Chief Technical Officer, who are the line managers of the academic, administrative and technical staff. Opportunities to develop and expand the role of staff are an integral part of the P4G meetings of professional staff with their line manager.

The School actively encourages professional staff to expand and develop their roles. For example, technical staff participate in the development of our under- and postgraduate teaching, are encouraged to participate in suitable courses and staff exchanges. For example, administrative and technical staff have recently been seconded to Catalan companies (Xenopat and ZeClinics) in Barcelona as part of a 3DNeoNet research project led by Prof Brendan Kennedy. | Head of School, School Manager, Chief Technical Officer | Ongoing | Ongoing |

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
			Teaching, Learning and Assessment			
4.9	The School should consider how best to ensure consistency in assessment and feedback across programmes. Discussions highlighted a lack of marking rubric, feedback and moderation practices across teaching teams; the availability of model answers, where appropriate, could also be considered. The RG acknowledged that the new academic regulations would help to address some of these recommendations.	1	The School acknowledges these concerns and have moved to implement these recommendations. As noted by the RG, these also form part of the implementation of the new Academic regulations.	Head of School, Head of T&L, Heads of Subject	1 January 2020	1 April 2020.
4.10	The School should consider what training needs to be provided to those who teach on modules, particularly PhD students, to ensure that their practices are aligned with School and University assessment practices	1	The School agrees with the Review Group that postgraduate tutors and demonstrators should be fully supported in their teaching role. They meet with the module coordinator prior to delivery of practical classes. BMOL40080: Teaching in Higher Education is a core module in the curriculum of postgraduate students. This module was initiated by the School with the express purpose to train and support postgraduate students in their teaching roles.	Head of T&L	Ongoing	Ongoing
4.11	The School should continue to monitor the mechanisms by which teaching quality is assessed, as well as the	1	The School will continue to do so.	Head of School, Head of T&L, Heads of	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	measures used to ensure faculty is appropriately trained.			Subject		
4.12	The School should consider offering third and fourth year students the opportunity – perhaps through a specific module for which they could get credit – to help out with laboratory practicals; this might relieve some of the pressure on PhD student demonstrators and would also help undergraduate students to develop their own teaching skills.	1	The School has considered this and has concluded that teaching of undergraduate practicals by third and fourth year students is neither appropriate nor in the interest of our students. The School has therefore decided not to implement this suggestion by the RG.	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.13	The RG noted the concern of the School, in maintaining and replacing core equipment required in the delivery of undergraduate practical classes, and strongly recommends that the College and/or University provide funds that will ensure the School is able to maintain its highly regarded practical portfolio.	3	The School agrees with the Review Group that this is an ongoing concern. The School has at great cost updated and replaced core equipment required for under-graduate and postgraduate practicals. The School has linked into the University initiatives: UCD recently launched the UCD EQUIP scheme which invests in core research equipment. SBBS staff have enthusiastically participated in this programme and collaborated with colleagues in other Schools and Institutes. This resulted in a significant investment in research and teaching facilities. However, funds are extremely tight for replacement and upgrades of low to medium cost essential equipment.	N/A	N/A	N/A

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
			Curriculum Development and Review			
5.8	The School might consider how further to engage potential employers in ensuring that the curriculum meets employer requirements. In so doing, it will build on the willingness of industry, observed by the RG, to make suggestions around programme content and to participate in programmes leading to professional accreditation. In this context, the need to address the issue of access to space in the Conway Institute remains important.	1	The School will consider how to further develop our already excellent relationship with employers. The School recognises the important role that employer-participation plays in designing our curricula, and it has therefore appointed six Adjunct Staff drawn from major pharmaceutical companies and a venture capitalist firm to participate in programme development at under and postgraduate level. This is an ongoing process.	Head of School	1 February 2020	Ongoing
5.9	Viewing the curriculum in its entirety, the School should consider how best to support students in their second year of undergraduate programme. Much effort and attention is afforded to students transitioning into the UCD environment for the first year and then into specific degree programmes for years three and four. The provision of guidance, mentorship and pastoral care for second year students appeared less clear, and closer	1	The Review Group has touched on a wider issue that does not just affect students in our School. The School will raise this issue with the Associate Dean of Science to explore avenues on how to best support second year students,	Head of School, Head of T&L	1 February 2020	1 September 2020

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	interaction with faculty for this year-group would be beneficial, particularly as students are required to make choices for year three/four.					
Research Activity						
6.9	The School should consider how best to build on its areas of research excellence in order to facilitate the strengthening of a research culture. In doing this, consideration should be given to the potential advantages and disadvantages of devolving research strategy to Research Centres and Institutes.	1	The School has considered the suggestion by the Review Group to devolve its research strategy to Institutes and Centres, and it has declined to do so. The School's research strategy is a main driver in the selection process of new staff. This has been very successful, as exemplified by the percentage of research active staff in the School (97.6%), which is higher than that of the College (97%) and UCD (88.7%) as well as their success in winning major grants. The majority of School staff is a member of one or more research institutes and research centres. This includes the Directors of two institutes (Discovery and Conway) and one Research Centre (Beacon). The success of institutes and centres is therefore to a very large degree due to the vibrant research community of our School. The School research strategy is underpinned by strategic investments in research staff, equipment and consumables by the School. At present the school supports 14 PhD students	Head of School	N/A	N/A

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
6.10	During recruitment processes, consideration should be given to how best any potential new appointment would not only fulfil teaching needs but would also provide synergy with existing research.	1	This is current practice.	Head of School	Ongoing	Ongoing
6.11	Consideration should be given to having an 'away day(s)' so that all members of the School have an awareness of the diverse research activity in the School.	1	This suggestion will be considered by the Executive Committee	Head of School / Executive Committee	1 February 2020	1 June 2020
6.12	Given the diversity of the School's research portfolio, consideration should be given to how to strengthen further collaborative research activity that would help the School position itself for major funding bids.	1	The School will explore avenues to strengthen further collaborative research and grant applications. The Head of Research, Innovation & Impact and the Research, Innovation & Impact committee make staff aware of new opportunities via email alerts and at School meetings.	Head of Research, Innovation & Impact	1 February 2020	1 September 2020
6.13	The School Research Committee should review the current themes to ensure that they reflect appropriately, the nature of research currently undertaken by School members. Consideration should be given to having 'theme-promoting' activities such as, seminars, mini-symposia, PhD/MSc	1	The Research, Innovation & Impact committee will conduct a review of the School's research themes and associated activities and report their findings and recommendation to the School Executive Committee	Head of Research, Innovation& Impact	1 February 2020	1 September 2020

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	student presentations.					
6.14	School members are strongly encouraged to share grant proposals at drafting-stage with peers. This may require the School putting in place formal structures such as, workshops wherein proposals are presented to colleagues for feedback. Such structures will encourage early career researchers to engage with senior faculty at early stages when preparing funding applications.	1	The Research, Innovation & Impact committee will explore whether staff would like to have formal structures such as workshops focusing on funding applications. The head of this committee will make recommendations based on this survey. Staff do share research proposals and review each other's proposals on an informal basis.	Head of Research, Innovation& Impact	1 February 2020	1 September 2020
6.15	Given the diverse locations of School's research activity, consideration should be given to creating opportunities for all PhD students and postdoctoral researchers to have a forum where they can meet peers. In time, this could expand to allow for a mentoring scheme that facilitates career progression.	1	The School will explore possibilities to enhance contacts between graduate students and postdocs, and report to the Executive Committee for discussion. The School already organises coffee mornings to which all staff and postgraduate students are invited. The School also invites staff and postgraduate students to School meetings, which are preceded by a lunch, and invites staff and postgraduate students to social events.	Head of Graduate studies	1 February 2020	1 September 2020
6.16	The School has an established workload model. Newly appointed faculty in the School should have reduced teaching portfolios in their early years in	1	This is current practice. All newly appointed staff have a reduced teaching load in their early years.	Head of School	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	order to allow them to establish their research programmes.					
6.17	While the RG recognises the commitment of PhD students to contribute to undergraduate teaching activity, there is a risk to the School, given the downward trend in numbers of PhD students in recent years, that the burden of such activity may increase and impact on PhD students ability to conduct their own research (in particular demonstrator contracts).	1	The School is aware of this and shares the concerns of the Review Group. The School has reached out to HR to explore the possibility of creating the post of 'Teaching Assistant'. The School is currently hiring occasional staff to assist in specialist practical classes.	Head of School /Head of T&L	Ongoing	Ongoing
6.18	The RG noted the recruitment initiatives that exist and suggest that the School explore with other institutes outside Ireland, whether partnerships could be created that offer collaborative training programmes at national and international level.	1	This is currently in progress at research and taught MSc level. The School participates in several EU Innovative Training Networks that facilitate staff and student exchange. The School is part of SIBER (Society of International Bio enterprise Education and Research). The main goal of SIBER is to promote and enhance business education for Biotechnology students and scientists to help discoveries reach commercialisation. The network includes well recognised universities like Case Western Reserve University, John Hopkins University, Karolinska Institute, University of Auckland, University of California, University of New South Wales, University of Portland/OHSU, University of Pretoria and University of San Francisco.	Head of School /Directors of MSc programmes	Ongoing	Ongoing

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			The School has been very proactive in its participation in SIBER. Dr Garzon Vico, one of our directors of MSc Biotechnology & Business and the MSc Biotherapeutics & Business, has represented the School at SIBER for the last two years, and since June 2018 has been part of the Executive Committee. As part of his role in SIBER he has been exploring the possibility of offering an international collaborative postgraduate program (similar to the CEMS master's in management), which would project the School internationally and enhance our current recruitment of international students.			
6.19	The RG notes the School's concern to replace communal 'small item' research equipment (less than €10,000). Consideration should be given to whether researchers should contribute an annual research levy to build a fund that can be used to offset some of the costs associated with replacing or repairing equipment. The RG suggests that the School considers how funds received from OBRSS might be used for this purpose.	1	The Review Group's suggestion will be considered by the Executive Committee	Head of School, Executive Committee	1 February 2020`	1 June 2020
6.20	Consideration should be given to how best to promote the	1	The School is already very active in this area, activities include an ezine for alumni, an SBBS	Head of School, School	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	research and impact of that research carried out by colleagues within the School, to an audience beyond the School, College and the University. Given the prevalence and importance of social media, the School could explore the opportunities this affords to promote its research.		Newsletter, active participation in UCD and College of Science outreach events, as well as organisation of summer schools aimed at secondary school students. The School is also active on social media, including Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. In addition, our PhD students explain their research to the public in the annual Engage seminar series, which is the School's flagship outreach programme. Our communication and outreach activities are coordinated by a member of our administrative staff, who has this in her portfolio, and by the School's Science Outreach Officer.	Manager, Science Outreach Officer		
	Management of Quality and Enhancement					
7.9	The School is encouraged to maintain its rigorous approach to quality assurances and, for the benefit of ensuring the widest possible exposure of its faculty and staff to the review process, to rotate regularly, the memberships of the committees that lead the curriculum review.	1	This is current practice; the School does rotate the membership of committees leading the curriculum review on a regular basis.	Head of School, Head of T&L	Ongoing	Ongoing
	Support Services					
8.12	The College Internship Manager is clearly doing excellent work but has a significant range of placement responsibilities.	3	An additional College Intern Manager was recently appointed (1 May 2019)	N/A	N/A	N/A

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	Further resourcing is needed in this area to ensure that the newly developed undergraduate internship modules and the already established Master of Science internship modules are fully supported while also facilitating expansion.					
8.13	While acknowledging the welcome and popular incorporation into Stages 1-3 of the undergraduate programme of the 'series of elements' that develop career related skills, consideration might be given to a more formal embedding of a 'Career Readiness' module in the undergraduate programme to ensure that all students have awareness of, and access to, career advice and preparation.	1	The Head of School has reviewed the current opportunities for career development with the UCD Career & Skills Consultant of the UCD Careers Network unit. The conclusion of this review was that there is a lack of uptake by students, rather than a shortage of offerings. The Head of School and the UCD Career & Skills Consultant have therefore enhanced the visibility of these modules and events and promote participation by students via direct emailing and announcements at the start of lectures. At present career development is embedded in SCI10010 – Principles of Scientific Inquiry (stage 1) and BMOL20090 – Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology (Stage 2), which are taken by all students in the School. Second and third-year students can take SCI10040 - Preparing for Your Future Career as an elective module. The UCD	Head of School, School Manager	20 January 2020	1 February 2020

RG Report (Paragraph Reference)	RG Recommendation	Category	Action Taken/Planned	Lead (E.g. Name of Faculty/Staff/ Group)	Start Date	Planned Completion Date
			careers network organises stand-alone sessions for fourth year students which focuses on career development.			
8.14	There is potential for the School to publicise and actively promote fuller engagement with the Training and Development Services for postdoctoral faculty offered by the Career Development Centre.	1	The School will implement the Review Group's recommendation and alert Postdoctoral staff to training and development services offered by the Career Development Centre.	Head of School, Head of Research, Innovation & Impact	1 February	Ongoing
8.15	Students expressing difficulty with the writing of reports were unaware of the supports available in the UCD Writing Centre. Module coordinators could take a more active role in promoting this support service where appropriate.	1	The School will increase awareness of UCD writing supports for students available at the UCD Writing Centre. The School will provide a standard text to module coordinators describing writing support for students to be included in Brightspace.	Heads of Subject, Module Coordinators	20 January 2020	Ongoing
8.16	The School should embrace the potential of a fuller engagement with support offered by UCD Global, in order to expand outward mobility of undergraduate students in particular.	1	The School will liaise with UCD Global to explore avenues to enhance outward mobility of undergraduate students.	Head of School, Head of T&L	1 February 2020	1 September 2020

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Collaborative Provision						
9.6	Expand exchange partnerships to further promote and encourage take up of outward mobility opportunities at undergraduate level in particular.	1	The School will liaise with UCD Global to explore avenues to enhance outward mobility of undergraduate students in the format of a 'semester abroad' and within the context of formal exchanges with universities abroad.	Head of School, Head of T&L	1 February 2020	1 September 2020
External Relations						
10.15	External partners involved in internship placements with the School indicate that outgoing undergraduate students might benefit from more formal support in the management of career expectations.	1	The School in collaboration with the UCD Careers Network provides our students with a number of opportunities (please refer to point 8.13). Within this context and with assistance of the UCD Careers Network unit the School will provide more formal support to manage career expectations by students. At present career development is embedded in SCI10010 – Principles of Scientific Inquiry (stage 1) and BMOL20090 – Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology (Stage 2), which are taken by all students in the School. Second and third year students can take SCI10040 - Preparing for Your Future Career as an elective module. The UCD careers network organises stand-alone sessions for 4th year students which focuses on career development.	Head of School, Head of T&L	1 February 2020	1 September 2020
10.16	The School should take a more proactive role in approaching industry, local authority and government partners, in relation to expertise sharing.	1	The School is extremely active in collaborations with Industry, local authority and government partners through national and internationally funded programmes (eg, Beacon, 3D Neonet, Precision Oncology Ireland, Acclimatize, Swim. In	Head of School	Ongoing	Ongoing

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			addition, the School has appointed seven Adjunct staff from industry, publishing and private practice to enhance our interaction with partners outside UCD. We will continue this path of engagement with external partners			
10.17	The School should establish a School-based rota for outreach and engagement activities so the burden of staffing and running such events does not fall repeatedly on the same personnel. Activities that promote the School and its subjects should be supported by faculty and staff in the School.	1	The School agrees with this comment and this will be raised at a School meeting for discussion with staff. Based on the outcome of these discussions the Executive Committee will develop a plan to share the burden of outreach and engagement in a more equitable manner.	Head of School, Executive Committee	14 January 2020	1 June 2020
10.18	The School should expand the very positive internal newsletter initiative across digital/web-based platforms to promote more fully the distinctive activities, achievements and innovative developments of the School across research, teaching and learning to both academic and wider, non-specialist communities.	1	This is current practice: the School newsletter is published on Twitter and Facebook whereas the Alumni E-zine is published on LinkedIn.	Administrative team	Ongoing	Ongoing