

International Education Office

Peer Review Group:

Mr. M. O'Sullivan, VP for Planning, Communications & Development, UCC (Chair)
Dr. M. Connolly, Department of English, UCC
Ms. M. Kilduff, International Officer, NUI Maynooth
Dr. T. Barron, Director of the International Office, University of Edinburgh, UK

Brief Description of conduct of Site Visit:

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 5th – 7th February 2001 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the unit as a group and individually,
- ii) Representatives of students,
- iii) Representatives of the academic staff,
- iv) Professor M. A. Moran, Registrar & VP for Academic Affairs
- v) Mr. C. O'Brien, Academic Secretary,
- vi) Professor A. Hyland, VP and member of EMG,
- vii) Professor P. Woodman, Dean of Arts Faculty
- viii) Dr. G. Burnell, Socrates representative, Science Faculty

and a visit to facilities of the unit in UCC.

An exit presentation of the principal findings of the Peer Review Group was made to all the staff of the International Education Office in the afternoon of the second day.

Description of International Education Office

Head of Unit: Ms. L. Tobin

No. of Staff: 6 administrative staff (f/t perm.)

Location of Unit: Top Floor, West Wing, Main Quadrangle

Functions of Unit:

- To promote and administer international programmes at UCC.
- To initiate, manage and report on international activities across the university.
- To provide the secretariat for the International Education Committee of Academic Council.
- To represent the university.

Mission Statement

“To develop **strategic partnerships** with other educational institutions within the region, across the island of Ireland and **internationally** and to provide a **high quality** of undergraduate **student experience**.”

Aims & Objectives

- To initiate and maintain positive relationships with higher education institutions in the US and Europe.
- To provide a first class support service to visiting students.
- To support academic departments in relation to the implementation of the JYA and SOCRATES programmes.
- To assist domestic students participating in the SOCRATES programme in their preparation of the year abroad.
- To promote a limited number of US scholarship exchange opportunities for domestic students.

General Comment on Quality Review

The Peer Review Group found that the Self-Assessment Report was a very helpful and good quality document, and in the main covered the issues which the department was asked to address.

Extremely positive feedback was received from students and academic staff about the International Education Office. The staff of the International Education Office are regarded as hardworking, efficient, effective, friendly and caring; they are perceived to operate well as a team. It is the view of the Peer Review Group that the staff of the International Education Office are already working at full capacity.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendations of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. 02
PRG expressed concerns with regard to the staffing structure, and supported the view that there is a need for additional senior and administrative support staff if the expansion in numbers envisaged by the university is to be achieved without diminishing quality.	<p>Comment: Professor G. Wrixon informed the QPC that additional earned income by a Department could be used, in principle, to help increase the number of staff in that department. However, it would be up to the University Budgetary Committee to decide the parameters of this and if the Department did obtain more income, what percentage could be used by the Department to finance additional staff. The QPC noted that additional staff must be linked directly to additional income.</p> <p>QPC recommended that the Unit make an application to the Budgetary Committee stating the case for additional staff.</p>	<p>IEO did make application (by means of its budget submission to the Registrar) but has not yet received any additional staff.</p> <p>The need for the provision of new staff has become all more acute in the period following the Quality Review since the office has in the last year been given additional responsibilities. Chief among these is the recruitment of full degree students from China and India, new education markets of high potential which have been identified by Enterprise Ireland. The IEO has taken on this significant area of recruitment without any additional support.</p> <p>IEO will continue to make applications at appropriate times to the Budgetary Committee.</p>
The physical space allocated to the IEO is inadequate. Pressure on space has resulted in an acceptance of what appears to visitors to be a cluttered main office. It is important that the IEO presents a professional image to its clients.	<p>The QPC endorsed the recommendation of the PRG. The QPC agreed that the office should ideally be located on central campus.</p> <p>QPC recommended that this proposal should be referred to the Buildings Committee and should be made by the IEO, with the endorsement of the QPC</p>	<p>The recommendation was referred to the appropriate bodies in UCC. Since the office did not succeed in acquiring a new site. It has decided to maximise the existing space through a re-design process. This project is currently underway and is anticipated to be completed during 2002/03.</p>
The situation of the IEO could be helped by improved signage.	Recommendation noted by the QPC.	Signage has been improved by provision of additional signs in the West Wing.

Recommendations of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. 02
<p>The feedback from students indicates that the web (and not booklets) is the primary mechanism for accessing information about UCC and its programmes, and we therefore support the view that training in IT skills is crucial for staff of the International Education Office.</p>	<p>The QPC agreed with and supported the finding of the PRG</p>	<p>The re-designed UCC web site is almost ready to be made publicly available. It is hoped that it will be functional by the first week in October 2002. The IEO web site has been re-designed and is up on the web.</p>
<p>The PRG were impressed by the level of pastoral care provided by the IEO to both incoming and outgoing students. The group emphasised that the first two months' placement is a critical time, and recommended that contact should be made during this period with all UCC students placed abroad.</p>	<p>The QPC recommended communication with all students at the beginning of November of each year in order to check progress.</p>	<p>IEO has introduced a system of communication with students by email. However, it believes that academic departments also maintain contact if possible.</p>
<p>For both incoming and outgoing students accommodation is a major issue. Incoming students expressed a clear preference for accommodation which integrates international and Irish students. Whilst accommodation is not within the remit of the IEO, it is directly relevant to the quality of the student experience.</p>	<p>The Strategic Plan Implementation Committee are aware of the situation re accommodation for visiting students (and also Irish students) and are actively considering, as a priority, how best to address the issue.</p>	<p>The IEO welcomes the increased capacity that has been provided in the period following the review. It understands that a further 1,000 new places will be available by Oct. '03 with plans for a further additional 2,000 new places by Oct. '04. It is anticipated that in two years time the issue will no longer be of critical concern.</p>
<p>The PRG considered that in the case of the IEO the process of self analysis has been very beneficial; accordingly it was suggested that this process be continued on a regular basis rather than be linked to a Quality Review timetable.</p>	<p>Noted and welcomed by the QPC</p>	<p>Implemented.</p>
<p>Though the market for JYA students remains extremely competitive, the proven expertise of the IEO gives confidence that the targeted numbers can be realised. PRG recommended that a degree of flexibility in funding allocations be introduced to allow the IEO to bring the university's best academic staff to visit partner and target institutions.</p>	<p>The QPC recommended that the Office should refer the matter to the Budgetary Committee</p>	<p>See comment under 1 above. No additional resources have been allocated. The IEO has been given full responsibility for recruitment of full-degree students from China and India.</p>

Recommendations of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. 02
The role and benefits to the International Education Office of the new International Education Committee should be agreed and explained. It may be appropriate to consider including student representation on the Committee.	The QPC endorsed the recommendation of the PRG that there should be student representation on the IEC	In relation to the issue of student representation in the IEC, the IEO notes that the IEC is a committee of AC and it is the responsibility of the AC to determine membership of its committees.
The International Education Office should take steps to enhance its profile on campus.	The QPC endorsed the recommendation of the PRG and sought proposals from the IEO on the matter.	IEO is currently taking measures to re-design its website making it more accessible both within and without the campus. Plans to act further on this proposal during the coming academic year. IEO has plans for an article in the next edition of The Graduate Review.
There should be a consistent policy regarding the financial arrangements for the Early-Start programmes.	The QPC were informed that this matter is already under active consideration by the Finance Committee with a view to an early resolution.	The issue has not yet been resolved and the IEO is awaiting update from the Finance Committee.
In the year prior to their departure outgoing Socrates students should be introduced to visiting students at UCC from their host institution. This may help minimise the problems encountered by students on arrival at the host institution.	The Office is already implementing this recommendation and have established a resource room and a mentoring scheme.	Action on the part of the IEO is ongoing. the IEO, however, is of the view that academic departments are in a stronger position to implement monitoring/pairing duets their more direct classroom contacts with students.
When dealing with new Socrates partners, the International Education Office should seek detailed information from other institutions which have established links with those partners.	The QPC recommended that each new partnership should be set up with the particular requirements of UCC in mind.	This is being done.

Comment on Benchmarking

In the past year the attention of the IEO has been placed in implementing the recommendation of the review. It is the intention of the IEO to attempt to obtain information on how similar units operate in other universities outside Ireland in the coming year. However, this is a time-consuming process and with the continued increase in student numbers coming from abroad, the resources of the unit are seriously stretched.

The unit plans to hold an ‘away day’ for all staff in the immediate future which will allow time for consideration and the best approach to the issues yet to be resolved.