Cork Centre for Architectural Education

Peer Review Group Report

Academic Year 2012/13

Members of the Peer Review Group

Mr Matt Cotterell	Head of School of Mechanical, Electrical and Process Engineering, Cork Institute of Technology
Prof. David Dernie	Dean, School of Architecture + Built Environment, University of Westminster, UK
Prof. Urs Hirschberg	Faculty of Architecture, Graz University of Technology, Austria
Prof. James Horan	Design Strategies Dublin
Mr Niall McAuliffe	Buildings + Estates, University College Cork
Mr James Murphy	School of Architecture University College Dublin

Timetable of site visit

See Appendix 1

Suitability and Adequacy of the Timetable

The timetable was more than adequate, if somewhat overly extensive given the size of the programme. It gave the group the possibility to meet with all those involved in the CCAE, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of its structures, its management, its academic and operation methods, and its relationship to its parent Institutions, UCC and CIT.

Peer Review

The Peer Review took place at the various venues associated with the Cork Centre for Architectural Education on the days 25th - 28th September 2012.

Methodology

At the beginning of the visit, the Peer Review Group elected a Chairman, and decided that the areas of responsibility of individual members would emerge as the review progressed. By the time the review was nearing completion, the following areas of responsibility had evolved:

Prof. James Horan: Chair, and overview of identity, academic position and future directions of the CCAE

Prof. David Dernie: Representation, digital media

Prof. Urs Hirschberg: Research

Mr Matt Cotterell: Governance, Management and Staffing, Teaching + Learning

Mr Niall McAuliffe: Documentation, Support Services, Facilities

Mr Jim Murphy: External Relations

Site Visit

The site visit was conducted in a professional manner and the Peer Review Group was provided with excellent documentation, support and assistance by the representatives of both Institutions.

The Peer Review Group was particularly grateful to the President of CIT and the President of UCC for finding time to meet the group and engage in discussions with them. In the opinion of the Review Group, this was indicative of the importance attributed to the CCAE by both Institutions.

Peer Review Report

The individual members of the Peer Review Group kept personal notes throughout the entire visit. Throughout the visit, during the times allocated for private discussion within the group, aspects of these notes were exchanged and drafting procedures were commenced. This culminated in the draft of the exit presentation where each member of the Peer Review Group spoke on an aspect of the visit, related to the above mentioned areas of responsibility.

Following the visit, the comments of the individual members were sent by e-mail to the Chairman, who co-ordinated the comments, and produced a full draft of the report which was then re-circulated to all Peer Review Members for comment and observations.

The final draft of the report was then circulated again for sign-off before being forwarded to the Quality Promotion Unit in University College Cork.

Overall Analysis

Self Assessment Report (SAR)
This report was developed for two aligned but distinct purposes: as a programmatic review of the BSc(Honours) Degree in Architecture and Masters in Architecture in support of RIAI accreditation and as the SAR for the review of the Centre's quality assurance that was jointly undertaken by CIT and UCC.

It is clear that the SAR covers the majority of the recommended headings. All staff had the opportunity to participate in the QA process and the resulting SAR is demonstrably self-reflective. The student survey results were aggregated for the report but were accompanied by the actual survey output data.

The self assessment was adequate and usefully self-critical, but not sufficiently ambitious in terms of what is required to realise an international profile.

The analysis failed to identify the lack of support from the Institutions for the development of research following the review in 2008. It also failed to recognise the lack of encouragement with the use of digital technologies, particularly in the lower years.

SWOT Analysis
In common with the overall report the SWOT conducted was comprehensive and all staff were involved. The SWOT provided the material for the development of Table 16.1 List of Actions Identified from the SWOT Analysis.

This table details the objectives of the centre and the actions proposed to achieve these objectives.

An issue that did not emerge from the SWOT analysis but was raised in the student questionnaire was the limited instruction in digital media and the potential impact that this has on the employment prospects.

It is recommended that this issue be considered by Centre management and that the curriculum be developed to incorporate an appropriate level of instruction in digital media.

Benchmarking

The SAR did not contain formal benchmarking. It would be preferable for a comprehensive and formal benchmarking exercise to be carried out by the assessed unit which would provide objective comparisons of unit performance against other centres, particularly those that have characteristics or outputs that the CCAE aspires to.

Section 8 of the report catalogues the Peer Review and Quality Assurance Procedures that the Centre complies with, including Peer Review, External Examination processes etc. This section also lists comments from external examiners and the RIAI accreditation board on the curriculum, resources and facilities etc. In addition to this an article published in The Architects Journal contained a positive critique of the Centre and the work of the MArch students in particular.

Whilst the external examination process, analysis by accreditation bodies and published articles do provide a degree of external review, it does not equate to a formal benchmarking process.

As benchmarking can be a useful aid to the strategic management process at any time, it is recommended that a comprehensive benchmarking exercise is carried out by the Centre as soon as possible.

HETAC Programme Outcomes

The attached schedule supplied by the CCAE identifies how the BSc programme meets the Level 8 HETAC programme outcomes and the MArch programme meets the level 9 HETAC programme outcomes. The Peer Review Group acknowledge this.

Findings of the Peer Review Group

Overall Impressions

The visit coincided with the CCAE receiving news that the 4 year Bachelor programme and the one year Masters programme is about to formally receive accreditation from the RIAI. This is a

watershed for the Centre and it both recognises the enormous work carried out by all staff concerned in achieving that goal, and the opportunity that now presents itself to the Centre. The dedication and commitment clearly evident in the management and staff of the Centre is a testimony to the achievements already realised, and the possibilities that lie ahead.

It was clear to the Peer Review Group that a culture of energy and enthusiasm exists within the staff, coupled with a professional approach to pedagogy and a genuine care for the student population. This was reflected by the students' views of their own programmes.

The combination of intellectual endeavour, and practical making of models and artefacts, which is already present in the Centre, is to be encouraged and the possibility for its further development should be supported.

The Peer Review Group did not underestimate the enormous task involved in developing an architectural programme jointly supported by two different Institutions, UCC and CIT. The support and flexibility which was clearly evident, demonstrated the willingness and ambition of these two institutions to make a real success of the CCAE. There are now further challenges which need to be addressed in both the short and longer term.

Recommendations

It is of paramount importance that the CCAE maintains and develops its identity as a stand-alone centre to avoid any ambiguity that might arise resulting from the perception that it belongs to one institution or the other. This identity needs to be strongly branded and clearly communicated to the Centre's own academic community, the academic communities of both UCC and CIT, and the public at large, local, national and international.

Coupled with its identity, the Centre should also clearly articulate its academic and intellectual position with respect to the discipline, identifying its mission and vision, and demonstrating its unique qualities and unique character. The richness of its origins can contribute to this, but it will also require strong academic leadership.

The Centre should be aware of its position within, and its relationship with, the local city of Cork community, including the Local Authority, and the local Professionals. It should be conscious of the significant contribution it can make to the culture of Cork City. The nature of the projects undertaken at Bachelors and Masters level could, through their relevance to Cork and its surroundings, reinforce this community connection, and become a platform for some further research activities.

There was real evidence in the meeting with the stakeholders that they fully support the work of the Centre, and would welcome further and continued engagement.

The Review Group recommends that the Centre sets up an Advisory Board at the earliest opportunity. This Board should include a cross section of the wider community and should be multi-disciplinary. The Advisory Board should be invited to engage with the Centre on a regular and structured basis, and it should be regarded as an essential part of the intellectual debate and discussion about the future of the Centre.

Digital Media

The Group recommends that the School engage more fully with digital drawing and digital crafting in all years. The Group observes a need for a 'cultural shift' in the way digital media is taught and evidenced in the portfolios at all levels. The Group maintain that there is a need for significantly more teaching of computer skills including a creative exploration of ways of thinking with digital media, digital drawing and digital fabrication that reflect contemporary technologies and current practice. This shift in approach will not only complement the existing focus on hand drawing and hand crafting, it will also enhance students' employability by raising skill levels and the quality of portfolios.

The drawings in the lower School were less well presented than in the Masters programme. The dominant use of tracing paper, pencil and ink pens, hallmarks of traditional hand drawing, particularly in years one and two, meant that the portfolio was less portable and would in the most part not compare well, set against international standards. With more digital skills students could combine traditional skill bases to create hybrid drawings, using more diverse materials and output devices.

The strength of such images will contribute to the way in which the School fairs internationally in the future and is an integral part of a branding exercise that the Review Group also recognises as central to developmental strategy.

The Review Group recognises that in order to achieve this culture shift in terms of digital technologies, it will be necessary to receive additional funding for output devices and technical expertise form the two Partner Institutions. Augmenting teaching and output devices both in the classroom and particularly in the workshop will bring long-term financial benefits. Without such investment, the Review Group is of the view that the School will not be able to attain its full potential in terms of both quality and distinctiveness.

Research

The Review Group was informed by many members of the Centre's staff that research has been somewhat neglected during the effort to gain accreditation. Many expressed regret about this and declared that the research agenda will be the next big area of focus. It was particularly regrettable that there had been no financial support to the Centre following the peer review of research in 2008. At this point 'world leading' research potential was observed. The Group considered that a lack of additional financial support from the institutions has disadvantaged the realization of this potential.

The Review Group shares this view. It sees research as a critical issue for the academic standing, and for the intellectual culture of the Centre. It can also be a way to obtain additional non-exchequer income.

Opportunities

The Review Group sees one of the Centre's unique characters as being part of two founding Institutions, both of which have strong research traditions, as having great potential. What's more, architecture is currently a highly relevant field for many research areas that receive national and international research funding. Consequently the Centre can be a natural partner in interdisciplinary research efforts with a variety of other research units at both CIT and UCC, and beyond.

Discussions took place with the research and innovation unit managers of both CIT and UCC. The impression is that the units are well developed and that they are very willing to give support, even though they have little experience and knowledge about the specifics of architectural research.

Thus there are many opportunities in research, with which the Centre's staff could engage. Yet, despite the opportunities and the available support there is a number of obstacles in the way to getting the research off the ground.

Research Direction

The research direction the Centre intends to pursue is rather unclear. The self-report lists four main areas: Responsive Architecture, Design Pedagogy, Humanities and Architecture and Innovative Architectural Design.

Responsive Architecture is a relevant and promising new area of research. The CCAE was involved in research projects about embedded technology and new materials shortly after its founding. This is an area where there is a positive track record. The problem is that there was no follow-up activity in these areas since then.   Furthermore these technology-oriented research projects didn't appear to have any connection to the teaching activities of the Centre and didn't seem to create a research profile that the CCAE staff could identify with. It is essential that future engagement in this area be more closely related to teaching activities.

The other three areas the self-report mentions are very broad and less distinct. They are certainly closer to the hearts of the Centre's staff and its teaching activities, but they are not sufficiently well defined. At this stage it unclear how they can be developed into a credible research profile that will also attract funding.

Review Group's Recommendations

The Review Group recommends that the Centre make a concerted effort in the area of staff development in order to get research off the ground. Young staff, in particular, should be encouraged to present their work at international conferences or workshops. Research in architecture is currently a hot issue at many architecture schools across Europe. There are a number of international networks (for example the EAAE, or other, more specialised associations) that promote architectural design research by organising workshops and conferences which are particularly geared towards young staff. By attending, they can exchange notes and establish ties with other young researchers working on similar issues.

As the teaching loads currently are not the same for CIT and UCC staff, it is easier for UCC staff to develop their own research profiles. Elsewhere in this report the Review Group strongly recommends the development of a cross-institution workload model based on principles of parity and transparency. But while the current situation persists, the Review Group recommends that special incentives should be developed for CIT staff to also be able to engage in research activities. Right now there are only a small number of researchers among staff that account for most of the CCAE's research publications. In the future, the Centre should strive for a more balanced picture, with greater numbers of staff actively taking part in research and publishing their results.

The Review Group also recommends that the CCAE engage in interdisciplinary research with more experienced partners at CIT and UCC. Ideally the research topics should feed into teaching and particularly design studios. The Centre is currently too small to pursue research activities that are only of peripheral interest to its overall pedagogic development. The structure of the Master's course already seems to offer the possibility to take up design research topics and to

develop them to considerable depth.

Recommendations relating to Governance, Management and Staffing, Teaching and Learning

The future strategic direction and positioning of the Centre needs to be reviewed at the highest levels in UCC and CIT. This is to enable the Centre to attain its full potential, building on its existing strengths and to firmly establish a sustainable future for architectural education and research in Cork. This strategy needs to consider local, national and international developments and trends. Architecture is a vital component of the cultural make-up of Cork and its environs which is a major tourism attraction for overseas visitors to Ireland and to Europe generally.

Significant progress has been made in the development of joint procedures and regulations between UCC and CIT, but this process isn't complete and the issue of joint staff appointments now needs to be considered. Ideally staff should be appointed to the Centre itself, and over time there should be a move to a clear single line management for staff within the Centre. More clear information needs to be communicated to students about the management of the Centre and opportunities available in both institutions, particularly regarding facilities. Enhanced student handbooks would be a good vehicle for this.

Significant opportunities exist to strengthen links with staff and centres of expertise in both CIT and UCC and with other bodies/entities in the region.

A large proportion of the Centre's activity is delivered by part-time staff. The manner in which such staff are engaged with and appointed by the Centre needs to be explored. The processes need to be clear and unambiguous.

All staff (full-time and part-time) would benefit from a formal staff induction process. This should embrace best practices in teaching, learning and assessment, details of administrative procedures/regulations and information relating to staff/student support services. Staff intending to engage in research will also need to engage in staff development activities specific to this activity.

A two-way engagement with the Teaching and Learning Centres in both UCC and CIT would enrich the learning experience of CCAE students and students of other programmes in UCC and CIT. The studio-based component of architectural education is an exemplar of project-based learning and there is much to be learnt about its effectiveness. The engagement with the

Teaching and Learning Centres could enhance both the activities of the CCAE and the Teaching and Learning Centres themselves.

Facilities

There is ample floor area within the Centre for the current number of staff and students, but there are issues regarding the provision of, and access to, workshop facilities. The Centre has an inadequately small workshop that is equipped with a limited number of powered and hand tools. These facilities are supplemented by the craft workshops on CIT's Bishopstown Campus. In addition the Centre utilises the facilities of the National Sculpture Factory, St Johns College and the Crawford College of Art and Design.

The co-ordination of access to the various workshops and the transport to and from these locations is an onerous task. Students referred to the difficulties posed by the dispersed nature of the facilities. However they understood the constraints that the Centre is operating under and that it would not be practical to duplicate facilities.

Recommendations relating to Facilities

The Review Group recommends, subject to resource availability, that the on-site facilities be expanded in a manner that would be complementary to the existing available facilities particularly on CIT's Bishopstown campus. The specific area of development would be the provision of digital output devices.

It is also recommended that the Centre management team engage with the Head of Crafts in CIT to discuss enhanced availability of workshop facilities and of technical support for Copley Street with a view to optimising student access and use of workshop facilities in both locations.

A student Common Room is a high priority to allow students from various stages to mix socially and to share their experiences. It would also facilitate informal networking of staff and students. The Common Room should be used to communicate the availability of facilities, activities and support services in both CIT and UCC.

External Relations

The Review Group is supportive of the location of the centre in Cork city and it notes the work that has been done already in establishing good relationships with other departments in UCC and CIT, with other allied institutions and with external stakeholders in the city and the profession. In the meeting with cognate disciplines and external stakeholders it was obvious that there is goodwill and openness to co-operate with the Centre among all parties.

It was also noted that contacts have been made with Schools of Architecture in other Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland and abroad, through External Examiners, Visiting Critics and Visiting Speakers. This should be encouraged and expanded as the Centre develops.

Recommendations relating to External Relations

The Erasmus programme is in its infancy and needs staff resources in order to be developed and managed in a comprehensive manner. This should be priority in order to enhance the student experience and to encourage relationships with other schools of architecture in Europe. There should also be some opportunities in this area for staff visits or exchanges.

The Review Group recognises the dual imperatives of internationalization and local presence. In order to forge a distinct international presence, the Group recognises the need to establish a stronger local and regional identity. This has benefitted a number of internationally significant schools, whose profile is reinforced by their relationship to and understanding of the land and culture to which they belong.

It is suggested that locating the project work of the Centre in Cork City and the local region will help to build up a body of knowledge, which will feed into research and into undergraduate teaching and learning. It will also facilitate making connections with other areas of expertise in UCC and CIT and with the wider academic community, the city and the profession.

The city of Cork and its surrounding landscape offer a variety of relevant and very specific research opportunities. By studying and documenting the architectural tradition of the area, students and staff not only develop a stronger sense for their cultural heritage, they can also make a very valuable contribution to the city of Cork.

It is important that the Centre develops this work in a serious and rigorous way and makes the results of the work available to interested parties and the public, in the form of exhibitions and publications as appropriate. It is suggested that this work be carried out primarily, but not exclusively, in the later years of the course when projects are of a longer duration and so can be studied in more depth.

At the same time the Centre should allocate adequate staff resources, both academic administrative, to develop the Erasmus programmes. Bi-lateral Erasmus agreements have an important role to play in the internationalisation of any School of Architecture. A communication strategy should be developed to specifically target the international community and a website should be put in place to raise its profile and encourage international student recruitment. Allocating sufficient academic and administrative staffing and website resources is necessary to establish the identity of the Centre at this critical stage in its development.

Finally

The Peer Review Group wishes to express its thanks to all representatives of the CCAE, CIT and UCC who have been most helpful in assisting the Peer Review Group in its tasks. It also thanks all concerned for the kindness and courtesy shown and the excellent hospitality received.

Appendix 1

CORK CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT
TIMETABLE

Tuesday 25 September 2012	
14.00 – 17.00	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group Briefing by Professor Ken Higgs, Acting Director of Quality, UCC and Dr. Stephen Cassidy, Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, CIT. Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days. Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified.
19.00	Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Director of Centre and the Centre's Co-ordinating Committee Gary Boyd Kevin Busby Declan Fallon Jim Harrison Katherine Keane, Associate Director Professor Kevin McCartney, Director

Wednesday 26 September 2012		
08.30 – 08.45	Convening of Peer Review Group	
08.45 – 09.15	Professor Kevin McCartney, Director	
09.15 – 09.45	Katherine Keane, Associate Director	
09.45 – 10.45	Group meeting with all Centre staff	
10.45 – 11.15	Tea/coffee	
11.15 – 13.00	Private meetings with individual staff members from the Centre PRG Team A 11.15: Kevin Busby 11.30: Susan Dawson 11.45: Declan Fallon 12.00: Mary Moloney 12.15: Jim Harrison 12.30: Katherine McClatchie 12.45: John McLaughlin	Private meetings with individual staff members from the Centre PRG Team B 11.15: Paul Butler 11.30: Gary Boyd 11.45: Margaret Mulcahy 12.00: Andrew Lane 12.15: Gerry McCarthy 12.30: Kevin Gartland 12.45: Jason O'Shaughnessy
13.00 – 14.00	Working lunch	
14.00 – 15.00	Visit to core facilities of Centre (Copley Street), escorted by Professor Kevin McCartney & Katherine Keane	
15.00 – 15.35	Representatives of 1st and 2nd Year Students Jim Byrne, 2nd Yr	

	Bernard Curtin, 1st Yr Jedda Desmond, 1st Yr Denise Fenton, 2nd Yr Siobhan Keogh, 2nd Yr
15.40 – 16.15	<u>Representatives of 3rd and 4th Year Students</u> Daire Calnan, 3rd Yr Kieran Cremin, 4th Yr Alice Coyle, 4th Yr Stephen Hannon, 3rd Yr Shane Kenny, 3rd Yr Deirdre Power, 4th Yr Richard Robinson, 4th Yr Erin Rose, 3rd Yr
16.20 – 16.55	<u>Representatives of post-graduate & past graduate students</u> Mary Aird, graduated BSc Architecture 2011 Tim Healy, graduated BSc Architecture 2011 Ciaran Deasy, graduated BSc Architecture 2012 Alan Macilwraith, graduated BSc Architecture 2012 Francis Shier, current MArch student Alana Straub, current MArch student
17.00 – 18.30	<u>Representatives of stakeholders</u> Mr Haley Bueno, RIAI Southern Region Chairman Mr Tony Duggan, City Architect Mr Brian McGee, Archivist, Cork City Council Ms Erin O'Brien, Cork City Council Planning Mr Kevin Smyth, RIAI Southern Region Representative Mr Simon Walker, Walker Architects Mr Billy Wilson, Wilson Architects
19.00	Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day, a followed by a working private dinner.

Thursday 27 September 2012	
08.30 – 08.45	Convening of Peer Review Group
08.45 – 09.45	Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs, UCC Dr. Barry O'Connor, Registrar & Vice President for Academic Affairs, CIT
9.45 – 10.15	Preparation of first draft of final report
10.15 – 10.45	Professor Anita Maguire, Vice-President for Research & Innovation, UCC Dr. Niall Smith, Head of Research, CIT
10.45 – 11.15	Tea/coffee
11.15 – 11.45	Dr. Bettie Higgs, for the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, UCC Dr. Stephen Cassidy, Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, CIT
11.45 – 12.15	Mr. Seamus McEvoy, Interim Chair of Student Services, UCC Dr. Dan Collins, Head of Administration and Student Affairs Manager, CIT
12.15 – 13.00	Mr. Cormac McSweeney, Finance Office, UCC

	Mr. Niall Cremin, Finance Office, CIT
13.00 – 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 – 14.20	Orla Flynn, Head of CIT Crawford College Art & Design
14.20 – 15.20	Meeting with members of Joint Academic Standards Board and Joint Management Board **Joint Academic Standards Board** Dr Stephen Cassidy, Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, CIT Ms Rose McGrath, CIT Academic Council Representative Professor Paul McSweeney, UCC Academic Council Representative Mr. Paul O'Donovan, Academic Secretary, UCC **Joint Management Board** Dr Michael Creed, Head, School of Engineering, UCC Ms Katherine Keane, Associate Director, Cork Centre for Architectural Education Mr Michael Loftus, Head, Faculty of Engineering & Science, CIT Professor Kevin McCartney, Director, Cork Centre for Architectural Education **Members of both Boards** Professor Paul Giller, Registrar and Senior Vice President, UCC Dr Barry O'Connor, Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, CIT Dr Joe Harrington, Head, School of Building, Civil & Environmental Engineering, CIT
15.20 – 16.00	Preparation of first draft of final report
16.00 – 16.45	Dr Brendan Murphy, President, CIT
19.00	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for completion and submission of final report.

Friday 28 September 2012	
08.45 – 09.00	Convening of Peer Review Group
09.00 – 09.45	Professor Paul McSweeney, deputising for Professor Patrick Fitzpatrick, Head, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science Mr Michael Loftus, Head, Faculty of Engineering & Science, CIT
09.45 – 10.30	Dr Michael Murphy, President, UCC
10.30 – 11.15	Preparation of first draft of final report
11.15 – 11.45	Professor Kevin McCartney, Director Katherine Keane, Associate Director
12.00 – 13.00	Exit presentation to all staff, to be made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. This presentation is not for discussion at this time.