

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

QUALITY REVIEW FOLLOW-UP REPORT

A meeting was held on the 13th of January 2012 to discuss the progress of the Department of Chemistry and the College of Science, Engineering and Food Science (SEFS) in implementing the recommendations for improvement arising from the quality review of the Department of Chemistry.

Present: Professor Michael Morris, Head, Department of Chemistry
Professor Jeremy Glennon, Chair, Quality Committee, Department of Chemistry
Professor Patrick Fitzpatrick, Head, College of Science, Engineering and Food Science
Ms. Deirdre O'Brien, Administrative Officer, Quality Promotion Unit
Dr. Norma Ryan, Director, Quality Promotion Unit

General comment

The Department of Chemistry found the quality review process very instructive internally and welcomed the process. The Department feels that they have made good progress on internal structures and facilitating staff to develop teaching and research plans. The Department is appreciative of their new staff members although the aging profile of the staff of the Department continues to be a concern. The Department is aware that it needs to be strategic in its goals, particularly in its alliances with industry. A special meeting of the Department was convened in order to discuss the recommendations in advance of this meeting. The Department would like to acknowledge the support of the College of SEFS in the implementation of the recommendations, notably the upgrading of facilities in the Kane Building.

The Head of College fully endorses the progress made in developing new structures. The industry focus of the Department is of strategic importance for the College.

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee

HR: Human Resources

FTE: full-time equivalents

VP: Vice-President

QIP: Quality Improvement Plan

SEFS: Science, Engineering & Food Science

HoC: Head of College

	PRG Recommendation	QPC Recommendation	Follow-up Report January 2012
1.	<p>The recommendations of the last Quality Review Report are implemented:</p> <p>i) The establishment of three-year Headship from senior members of Department in line with College practice.</p>	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted the lack of implementation of recommendations arising from the first quality review in 2001/02 and expressed its disappointment at the lack of progress.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>This recommendation can only be fully implemented with a statute change or with the unanimous agreement of all professorial staff.</p> <p>The majority of the Full Professors (A) wish to retain their contractual, legal rights to work within a system in which the Headship is rotated amongst them.</p> <p>There is some indication that the Governing Body committee considering the Role of the Professor might have some influence in this area. A document has been produced by this committee but has yet to be considered by Academic Council.</p>

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	<p>ii) A transparent method should be found to assign departmental duties, taking into account teaching, the extent of individual research activity and administration</p>	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted that staff are aware of the workloads of others. The real issue is discussion on how and on what basis the workload allocations are arrived at by the Head. The QPC noted that there is a perception that certain staff are 'favoured' over others.</p> <p>QPC welcomed the Departments plans to take action.</p> <p>QPC noted that the University is developing a model(s) for academic workload allocation to be implemented in 2011. QPC recommends strongly that the Department adopts and implements the University model following approval by Academic Council.</p>	<p>Implemented and ongoing.</p> <p>The Department confirmed that it is committed to implementing the University Workload Distribution Model.</p> <p>The Department has a new academic workload allocation document which staff members have the opportunity to view and comment upon at departmental meetings.</p> <p>The Department is concerned with the equalisation of overall workloads (as stated in finding/recommendation 10 below). Hence a transparent system will be devised toward this end. (Particularly with regard to accounting for teaching duties, research activities and administrative burden.)</p> <p>The Department is concerned with the teaching and administrative load of staff which is exacerbated by the non-replacement of recent retirements.</p>

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	<p>iii) An effort should be made to ensure that all students complete their PhD in a four year period and the project supervisors should endeavour to publish the work carried out in peer reviewed journals as quickly as possible.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>QPC welcomed positive response and commitment of the Department to improve Postgraduate training.</p> <p>QPC will welcome details on new assessment programme commencing in 2010 and asks for performance indicators to be provided in the QIP so successes can be measured</p>	<p>Implemented and ongoing</p> <p>The Department carefully monitors postgraduate students. The level of monitoring is thorough but there are still those who do not complete on time (within 4 years).</p> <p>A Research and Postgraduate Committee operated over the period of review and ran an assessment scheme for postgraduates with some considerable success. From 2010, the Department's Research & Graduate Studies Committee (RGSC) has devised an annual, multifaceted assessment programme for each postgraduate student so that issues, which may lead to a (full-time) PhD completion time greater than 4 years, can be identified and addressed by the supervisor, RGSC and Head of Department.</p> <p>Project supervisors are encouraged to publish the resultant work in peer-reviewed journals in a timely manner.</p>

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	iv) Make every effort to maximise the research income obtained by the Department.	Recommendation strongly endorsed.	<p>Implemented and ongoing</p> <p>This recommendation is a prime objective for the Department. There is also a departmental drive to encourage staff to diversify funding.</p> <p>Research income reached an <i>all time high</i> for the Department in the review period. Maintaining this level of success remains a critical objective for the department. The Department was judged as grade 5 in the UCC RQR for grant income generation; the highest in their panel.</p> <p>The Department is maintaining its level of income despite the downturn in the economy. (2009/10: €4,338,428.00; 2010/11: €2,543,059.00)</p> <p>The Department has attracted SFI, US and EU funding and a spin-out company generating some revenue for the College.</p>
	v) That the Department should build on the recent beneficial interactions with companies, including the Pfizer Pharmaceutical Corporation, Intel and Glantreo.	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC welcomed response of Department.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>This long-standing aspect of the Department's activities (in research, teaching and training) will remain a high priority.</p> <p>The Department has extended links to companies such as Millipore, DePuy, Intel, Waters and received a significant number of co-funded awards with these major international companies.</p>

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	vi) That the clear deficiencies in the departmental infrastructure and safety, such as laboratory layout and positioning and number of fume hoods, be addressed as a matter of urgency	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted that some areas of the Kane building have already been refurbished and endorsed the recommendation that the remainder of the building be refurbished as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Selected facilities and floors in the Kane Building were significantly enhanced and upgraded recently. The first year laboratories in the Science Building will be refurbished this year.</p> <p>The Department has appointed Professor J. Glennon to chair the Safety Advisory Committee. A senior laboratory staff member has been appointed with responsibility for monitoring safety in each of the laboratories. Risk assessments and annual reports have been compiled.</p> <p>The Department has welcomed investment made to date but areas of the building are still not at the highest standards and the Office of Buildings & Estates is aware of the situation and is working with the Department to make improvements.</p>
	vii) The Department should improve its general housekeeping in the laboratories from the safety point of view.	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>The QPC noted that the PRG was not impressed with progress since the first QR in 2002 and felt that there remains a need for the department to improve. QPC recommended that this recommendation be implemented immediately and that there is a statutory responsibility on the Head and staff of Department to ensure a safe working environment for staff and students.</p>	<p>Implemented</p> <p>The Department has in place, for the last two years, a Safety Advisory Committee, that ensures the completion of Safety Annual reports, risk assessments and actively responds to the College Safety Officer. The work of this committee has been praised by University authorities.</p>

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	viii) To ensure its future development, the Department must allow a more flexible use of space to accommodate existing and developing research needs.	Recommendation strongly endorsed. QPC commented that all space should be managed at Department level and ensuring equity of access for all staff within the Department to appropriate laboratory space.	Implemented. The Department has always managed space at a departmental level, previously through a space committee, and agreed at departmental committee level. This is now re-structured and more transparent The RFES-funded refurbishment of the 4 th and 3 rd floors of the Kane building was predicated on the fact that the new laboratories would be non-sectional in nature. All laboratories on the 3 rd and 4 th floor are for common use and are not individually assigned. The majority of the labs on the 1 st floor are the same.
	ix) The Department should continue and perhaps be a little more pro-active in encouraging staff at all levels to avail of existing university staff development programmes that they may not be fully aware of. In particular support staff should be encouraged to participate in such courses.	Recommendation strongly endorsed. QPC noted that the reviewers were of the opinion that not enough is being done in the Dept to support implementation of this recommendation.	Implemented The Department encourages staff to attend training and development programmes and a training log is kept. As part of the mentoring system courses were recommended to staff. The College is also encouraging training initiatives by helping technicians to develop their profiles.
2.	The Department of Chemistry move to School status as soon as possible.	Recommendation strongly endorsed QPC noted that the PRG were not convinced that the management and governance structures outlined in the SAR are fully operational within the Department. It was not clear that all staff are either fully informed or included in the	Not fully implemented. The Department is in favour of a school structure and largely operates such a structure, but the issue of the selection of the headship has stalled any further progression. The Department of Chemistry currently operates with a “school-like” structure. It is governed by a Head of

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		structures.	<p>Department alongside the Departmental Committee (with representatives from all staff, postgraduates, postdoctoral associates and undergraduates); both are advised by an Executive (comprising the Professors and Chairs of the Research and Teaching Committees, who are non-Professorial). A Vice-Head has recently been appointed. The Department's sub-committees meet regularly and report to both the Head and Departmental Committee. Recent changes enhance this structure and include a new External Advisory Board to which the Head of Department reports activities. All structures are in place and documented.</p> <p>The Department's fundamental tenet on restructuring is that it should strengthen the discipline of Chemistry and of Science in SEFS, and create a better scenario for growth, good governance and quality output.</p>
3.	The Professor of Organic Chemistry is appointed as soon as possible.	QPC noted this recommendation and the fact that this is a matter for the Head of College SEFS in line with the devolved structures currently operating within UCC.	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>The staffing plan was agreed by the College Management Team and only one vacancy was approved for filling. The Department is awaiting filling of this and other strategically important teaching and technical positions.</p>

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4.	Consideration is given to the filling of a lectureship in Energy Chemistry and appointment of experimental officers, as soon as resources permit.	QPC noted this recommendation and the fact that this is a matter for the Head of College SEFS in line with the devolved structures currently operating within UCC.	Implemented, appointee selected. The Department is concerned that the recent large number of retirements has jeopardised its teaching and research programmes as no full-time replacements have been made over the last three years. A strategic plan to include Chemistry lectureships and others Teaching Fellows and Experimental Officers has been submitted to SEFS, however it has not been put into operation. It is hoped that positive consideration of the current staffing position will be given to the Department as the head count loss over the last year (13.5%) is much greater than the SEFS average.
5.	It is essential that all members of the Department feel involved in the decision-making process. Serious consideration must be given to the development of a more collegiate atmosphere in the Department.	Recommendation strongly endorsed. QPC commented on the need to ensure all staff are engaged and committed with the affairs of the Department and that the Department avails of all the expertise of the staff in delivering its service of education. QPC noted that this is most likely to be achieved under a school structure and recommended that the Department moves to a school structure as soon as possible. QPC noted the commitment to the Department to improved communications within the Department and the intention of the Head to meet all staff over a period of time.	Implemented. Members of academic staff do meet at cross-cutting sub-committees and Departmental Committee. Advice is given and participation in the decision-making process occurs at these events. All staff are involved through the current committee structure (Research & Graduate Studies, Executive Advisory Team, Teaching & Examining Committee, Safety Advisory Committee, TASK Committee). The Department is very careful to ensure that chairs and membership of committees are rotated to ensure that younger members of staff are included. The Department will strive to improve its communications strategies over the coming year. Initially it intends to improve line-management structures. (Currently the Head of Department is line manager for all staff in Chemistry, currently some 35 individuals). A modern line-management structure will therefore be devised through

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			<p>Heads of Sections who will hold monthly meetings with their assigned personnel. Opinions will be gathered at these occasions for further action/discussion by/with the Executive Advisory Team (which consists of a mixture of Professorial and non-Professorial staff) or the Departmental Committee Meeting or the Head of Department.</p> <p>The Head of Department will carry on the newly initiated, annual private meetings with all members of academic staff and group meetings with both Technical and Administrative staff grades.</p> <p>Finally bi-monthly “Blue Skies” informal meetings will be held at which academic staff can discuss further internal linkages in research and teaching. The aim would be to provide a semi-social forum to promote ideas that do not otherwise appear from conventional mechanisms.</p> <p>HOD has met with all staff individually and this will be maintained. A new University mentoring process and establishment conditions have been introduced and will be maintained within the department</p>
6.	The Kane building be completely renovated.	QPC endorsed this recommendation.	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Selected facilities and floors in the Kane Building were significantly enhanced and upgraded recently. There are plans in place for further renovation and to upgrade the front of the Kane Building. It was noted by the Head of College that this is high on the project priority list for the University.</p>

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7.	A mentoring scheme for early career academic staff be established.	<p>Recommendation strongly recommended</p> <p>QPC noted that this recommendation is very much in line with University thinking and policy. QPC will welcome details of the proposed scheme in the QIP. QPC noted that mentoring should not just be carried out in preparation for a quality review but it should be a regular part of the normal activities of the staff of the Department.</p>	<p>Implemented</p> <p>A mentoring scheme is now in place. All members of staff now have a mentor, including the Head of Department. It is considered best practice to have a mentor for all staff members and not just early career staff.</p>
8.	The most effective lecturers should present first and second year courses.	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>QPC recommends that all staff should be strongly encouraged to participate in the developmental programme for academic staff delivered by Ionad Bairre. QPC also commented on the importance of lectures being given by academic staff and not by postgraduates.</p> <p>QPC looks forward to hearing of the evaluation and outcomes of the strategy with respect to the use of e-learning packages.</p>	<p>Implemented</p> <p>The Department ensures that lecturers with excellent communication skills present 1st and 2nd year courses. All 1st year classes are e-supported. All lectures are posted on <i>Blackboard</i>. The website has been upgraded. The Department provides online assessments.</p>
9.	Module and course evaluations be implemented immediately to address the issue of the lack of student feedback on performance throughout the year.	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted that the reviewers were not convinced that this is currently happening every year, as required under the University policy.</p> <p>QPC noted the planned action and welcomed it.</p>	<p>Implemented and ongoing</p> <p>Module evaluations are routinely carried out for the majority of modules. The students also provide feedback during monthly staff-student committee meetings.</p> <p>In light of the PRG comments, this recommendation has been taken in hand by the Department's Executive Advisory Team to ensure that all data is collected and collated going forward.</p>

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10.	The workloads of all staff in the Department should be reviewed immediately to take account of teaching, research and administration duties. Workloads should be monitored on an annual basis.	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted the intention of the Department to develop a model for academic workload allocation. The University is already planning to have a model developed by early 2011 and the QPC strongly recommended that the Department seek to implement the model as soon as it is published. The QPC also noted the need to implement the model in order to implement the recommendations of the reviewers.</p>	<p>Implemented and ongoing.</p> <p>The Department has a new workload distribution document which staff members have the opportunity to view and comment upon at departmental meetings.</p> <p>Relative weightings have not been included in this document as they can be difficult to rationalise.</p>
11.	The teaching load of newly appointed, early career permanent staff should be no more than half of the norm for at least the first two years following appointment.	<p>Recommendation supported.</p> <p>The new procedures in UCC allow for a lighter teaching load to be assigned to new appointees and especially for early career staff.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>The Department is proactive in this regard and tries to ensure that this recommendation is implemented whenever possible. Due to staff shortages individual teaching loads have increased despite changes in course structure.</p> <p>The Department has a small number of academic staff and are currently stretched to the limit (staff have to teach more FTEs than any other SEFS unit). As such it is difficult for the department to comply with this recommendation. The Department will however aim for such reductions, where possible, in future in light of overall workloads.</p>

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12.	Newly appointed, early career permanent staff must receive adequate resources to establish a research laboratory.	<p>Recommendation noted.</p> <p>QPC noted the response of the Department and that the Head of Department already has the facility within his control to facilitate this action. There is no guarantee that formation of a School will result in additional resources being allocated. However the QPC noted that the formation of a school will help address this issue and that this is also linked to mentoring of staff.</p>	<p>Not implemented</p> <p>The College has supported some researchers in this respect but the Department does not have the resources to support this recommendation.</p> <p>When/if more financial devolution is given to the Department (as a newly-formed School), it will be in a position to devise mechanisms to allow this type of allocation to occur. Currently the vast majority of resource allocation remains in the hands of the Head of College and the Department has virtually no leeway to allocate any money for the research purposes suggested without curtailing its core teaching activities.</p> <p>The Department will actively pursue start-up funds for newly appointed staff PIs from SEFS, the rest of UCC and industry.</p>
13.	The Teaching & Learning sub-committee must issue guidelines with regards to teaching materials submitted to Blackboard.	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>QPC welcomed the commitment to action by the Department</p>	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>There is a staff member responsible for <i>Blackboard</i> interactions.</p>
14.	The Department should designate a staff member to liaise with the VP for Student Experience.	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>QPC noted that action has already taken place on this.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p>