

**University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork**

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Department of Zoology, Ecology & Plant Science (ZEPS)

Academic Year 2005/06

12th June 2006

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Peer Review Group:

Professor Edward Johns, Department of Physiology, UCC (Chair)

Professor Tommie McCarthy, Department of Biochemistry, UCC

Professor Celia Holland, Department of Zoology, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Professor Bob Furness, Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, University of
Glasgow, UK

Timetable of the site visit

The timetable for the site visit is attached as Appendix A.

The reviewers found the timetable to be adequate and suitable for the purposes of the review.

PEER REVIEW

Methodology

The reviewers acted as a team throughout the site visit, which was conducted on 6th – 8th March 2006. All members of the PRG participated in discussions and visits to the administrative, teaching and research facilities of the Department and the UCC Library. Details are supplied in Appendix A. The reviewers had the opportunity to meet with staff and students of the Department, the Officers of the University and external stakeholders including representatives of employers and past graduates. It was the particular responsibility of the external reviewers to lead the discussions on the teaching and learning, research and scholarly activities during the review visit.

The PRG Report was drafted during the afternoon and evening of the second day of the site visit and finalised subsequently by email communications. All reviewers agreed to the final Report.

OVERALL ANALYSIS

The PRG congratulated the Department on the preparation of a very comprehensive Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which enabled the reviewers to gain an excellent understanding of the Department and the range of its activities. Furthermore, the PRG noted that the comprehensive list of recommendations in the SAR facilitated the group in its deliberations and, indeed, the review team have commended and endorsed most of these.

The PRG congratulated the Department on its achievements and particularly on its efforts over the past four years in amalgamating two different disciplines into the vibrant Department that ZEPS is today. The PRG was particularly impressed with the new Departmental accommodation, which is in three locations in very close proximity on a single site, with teaching and research laboratories that are equal to or better than comparable Departments in many countries in Europe.

The PRG noted and commended the staff of Department on the high quality of their teaching, on their research output and the consequent high grant income that has been generated from a wide range of sources. The reviewers noted that the numbers of PhD students graduating from the Department are at the top of the table within UCC and compare very favourably with national figures for these disciplines. It was also evident that the commitment of the staff of the Department to the teaching programmes was excellent and this was reflected in the enthusiasm of the students for their disciplines and in the comments made by the external stakeholders.

The reviewers were very impressed by the active engagement of all groups of undergraduate students, from First to Fourth Years, and postgraduates in the Review process. Furthermore, the PRG were struck by the openness and friendliness of both staff and students during the interviews and the motivation of both staff and students overall to project their discipline was outstanding. The external stakeholders were very supportive of the activities of the Department and commented very favourably on the quality of the education received from the Department whilst they were training in UCC.

The PRG were of the opinion that the Department is now well placed to move forward in a competitive way and that the recently completed relocation provides opportunities that must be grasped.

Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The PRG congratulated the Department on the preparation of a very comprehensive SAR and it was noted that the detailed recommendations helped the reviewers in their deliberations. The review team considered each of these recommendations in turn and have commended and endorsed most of them as will be described later in this Report.

The PRG were of the opinion that a more extensive presentation of metrics would have been of benefit and were of the view that this quality review exercise would have been facilitated by provision of data from the central administration of the University. The PRG recommended that the University consider mechanisms whereby such data, for example, research grant income, publication lists, human resource data, student FTE data, research postgraduates, could be provided in good time, which would assist Departments in the preparation of self-assessment reports. One option might be the provision of user-friendly databases accessible to Departments.

SWOT Analysis

It was evident that the SWOT analysis had been undertaken in a positive and constructive atmosphere and had generated a considerable amount of information. The outcomes of the exercise gave rise to a number of important issues that form the basis of the recommendations for the quality review. The PRG considered the following to be the key strengths and weaknesses of the Department:

Strengths:

- Staff, and their level of commitment to teaching, research, the student experience and access to the wider community;
- Ability to obtain substantial research funding on a sustained basis;
- Level of field teaching/field work training;
- High numbers of good quality postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows;
- Strong and positive ethos with high input of effort among most staff and extensive and very positive collaboration within most of the department.

Weaknesses:

- Lack of an integrated ZEPS strategic plan for research and teaching;
- Lack of full integration of all elements of the Department;
- Roles and responsibilities are not clearly-defined and this applies at all levels of staff;
- A lack of consideration of career development;
- Very large number of modules offered with a high proportion of these relatively low student uptake;
- A management organisation within the Department that was apparently ineffective/ineffectual.
- An excessively high range of workloads among staff, from extremely high to unacceptably low, and no transparency or fairness evident in workload allocation

Opportunities

- Relocation of the Departmental elements to one site with very good facilities provides a major opportunity to address weaknesses;
- High motivation of students and researchers ranging across the disciplines;
- Amalgamation of the Departments/Disciplines should bring economy of scale thereby reducing individual efforts in administration and costs;
- Potential to develop a Degree in Marine Biology reflecting the staff strengths within the Department and to cater to an area with high student demand.

Challenges

- Wider perception of ZEPS across UCC;
- Uncertainty concerning the long-term provision of external research funding;
- Lack of a career structure for postdoctoral researchers.

Benchmarking

The PRG found the benchmarking exercise undertaken by the Department to be impressive, thorough and helpful in that the Department had visited a number of sites representative of the range of disciplines within ZEPS and thereby had gained a great deal of useful data and experiences. It was clear from the SAR that the Department

compared favourably with the Department/Divisions/Schools visited. The PRG considered the institutions chosen for benchmarking by the Department to be very appropriate.

FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Department Details

The PRG recognised that for most of the period during which the assessment took place the staff and Department were accommodated in very poor conditions and that the move into the new accommodations in the Enterprise Centre had only been recently completed. The view of the PRG is that the new accommodation is excellent and such as to allow the Department to look forward to enhancing its teaching and research operations.

The PRG were concerned by the uneven distribution of the academic staff profile with five professorial staff, one Senior Lecturer and eleven staff at Lecturer grade (two temporary and nine permanent). The Department needs to seriously address this problem and it should be one of the foci of a strategic development plan.

A further issue that the PRG considered required urgent attention was that significant integration of the different elements of ZEPS remains to be completed. The location of all staff on a single site at this point in time provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that full integration can be achieved. The PRG encourages the Department to maintain efforts to complete this integration.

Department Organisation & Planning

The SAR presented a description of the Departmental managerial structure indicating that there was a sound organisation and regulation of operations conducted in a democratic fashion. What was of concern to the reviewers was the point made by all sectors of staff that there was a lack of actions consequent to issues being raised in the committee structures. It was apparent to the PRG that there needs to be a serious appraisal and reorganisation to the existing committee structures to enhance their effectiveness. A serious re-appraisal of the committee structure and functioning would open up the opportunity to develop and implement an integrated strategic plan.

One of the tasks of the re-organisation is to ensure that there is a recognised line management structure put in place for all staff defining roles and responsibilities

It was of concern to the PRG that there was a lack of an integrated strategic plan for the Department of ZEPS that encompassed all aspects of the Department's activities.

Teaching & Learning

The PRG found that the Department contributes to a wide range of degree programmes delivered at a very high quality level. However the PRG considered that the mechanisms by which this diverse teaching was delivered had become onerous and time-consuming. Because there is a lack of clarity in the administrative responsibilities, the PRG recommends the appointment of a departmental Director of Teaching and Learning who would act as a central focus in this regard and with a view to promoting excellence and also efficiency in the teaching and examining procedures.

The Director should evaluate and ensure, *inter alia*,

- The worth and cost of the night Degree in Environmental Studies,
- The contribution to Adult Continuing Education courses and whether these courses can be credited to ZEPS as student full-time equivalents and extended to include undergraduate students,
- The potential for new courses, e.g. marine biology, which might be more central to the expertise of ZEPS but could be developed largely from existing teaching modules.
- To ensure the class sizes for each module reach a critical mass so that they are conducive to effective student learning.
- To investigate methods or to develop new approaches to the learning experiences of the students with a view to widening the range of skills acquisition.

The PRG acknowledged the very active participation of staff in teaching development activities organised centrally in the University that had been recognised by the receipt of President's Excellence in Teaching Awards by some members of staff.

The PRG noted and commended the fact that there are year coordinators appointed for every year of the programmes offered by the Department. Indeed, these individuals were able to act as a cornerstone for that group of students through the academic year. However, the undergraduate students commented on the lack of a student handbook that would detail, for example, courses, options, course requirements, assessment submission deadlines, and considered that the introduction of such a handbook would be an advantage. The undergraduates were particularly appreciative of the use of *Blackboard* by staff of the Department and argued that its use be extended further.

Research & Scholarly Activity

The PRG acknowledged that there was a strong engagement of the Departmental staff in research and scholarly activity, which was particularly evident by the high international reputation of individuals, as exemplified by the editorship of chapters in books as well as authors of original publications. It was evident from the information provided in the SAR that the research output, the number of PhD students and successful graduates, research grant income, and the numbers of postdoctoral researchers are one of the highest in UCC.

The PRG would argue that the quality of research output was such that it would merit publication in the most prestigious journals in the fields in which staff are researching. Junior staff should be actively encouraged to publish in greater numbers, in the highest impact factor journals possible and to aspire to a higher output. Indeed, the metrics supplied in the SAR indicates that it costs approximately twice as much to generate a research publication in ZEPS as against Aberystwyth. This suggests inefficiencies either in gathering information or the pace at which writing up takes place. The Department is advised to take this metric into account.

The PRG recognised that the Department has a strong dedicated core of postdoctoral researchers, funded by research grant income, and considered that this further enhanced the quality and depth of the research conducted by the Department. The Group were of the opinion that the academic staff needed to ensure that the dependent researchers and postdoctoral fellows are strongly encouraged to prioritise publishing of research in order to ensure their future and to enable them to develop a competitive curriculum vitae.

As a consequence of the meetings with representatives of the researchers, the PRG recommends that the Department and, in particular, the University needs to consider with urgency how best to develop and support a career development structure for researchers who are not members of the lecturing staff. The benefit of this approach would be to sustain and enhance the research capability and ensure a strong research base and infrastructure within the University and compatible with the Fourth Level Ireland initiative.

Staff Development

The PRG was particularly struck by the relatively high proportion of junior staff at lecturer grade, including a number below the bar. An important strategic initiative would be to ensure the appropriate career development and progression of these staff. A recommendation would be that staff avail of training courses and the Personal Management and Development Scheme available in UCC.

To this end, the Department should ensure that all academic staff gain experience of academic administration within the Department and College of Science, Engineering and Food Science. The PRG considered that this is an important aspect of staff development but felt that care was needed to ensure that staff are not over-burdened. One option would be that such tasks should be rotated through the staff (perhaps on a three to five yearly cycle) so that a wider experience is gained by all and particularly by junior staff.

The PRG strongly felt that UCC should act proactively to seek a resolution to the issue of an appropriate career structure for technical support staff. Technician productivity is being seriously hampered by the delay in implementation of the revised career structure for the technical staff. The PRG recognised that this was an important issue for technicians throughout the University, but especially within ZEPS as a result of the history of its constituent departments, and a resolution needs to be delivered expeditiously.

External Relations

The PRG were impressed that the staff of the Department had developed extensive collaborations with institutions at national and international levels. Moreover, very good relationships have also been established with governmental agencies in Ireland that the PRG felt to be crucially important.

Support Services

The PRG visited the Library and found the services available to be excellent. The facilities were impressive, particularly with the expansion of the physical environment, but also with the e-Library facilities. The Group encourages the Department to take advantage of the training courses now being offered by the library in the use of databases and the e-Library.

Departmental Co-ordinating Committee & Methodology employed in the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG were of the opinion that the Department approached the quality review in a very objective and committed manner and in a manner that encouraged participation by all. There was a coordinating committee appointed, all staff participated in SWOT and the benchmarking was performed in an exemplary manner. The PRG commended the Chair of the Co-ordinating Committee for the effort in preparation of the SAR.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recommendations for improvement made by the Department

The PRG noted that the Department made a significant number of very carefully considered recommendations. The PRG found these to be very helpful in their deliberations and has commented on each of these in detail below, having considered them carefully in the context of the information contained in the SAR and also following the meetings held with staff, students and senior management of the University.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Staff Analysis		
Number of Administrative staff too few to support Department activity.	Recruit 1 or 2 additional Administrative staff.	<p>The PRG strongly disagreed with this recommendation. The PRG considered that a change in management structure as a consequence of merging all administrative staff of the Department into a single unit and delineating all roles clearly would remove many of the difficulties and increase the effectiveness of the administration. The PRG suggested that the process should be facilitated by central administration.</p> <p>The Head of Department should consult with the Head of College of SEFS on how best to proceed.</p>
Academic staff: regularisation of temporary staff situation and make provision to replace retiring staff.	Set out schedule for staff replacement and an orderly, timely and efficient replacement of staff.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation and considered it should be part of the strategic plan for the Department. The PRG recommended that the Department should review the positioning of staff with regard to career development and promotion, e.g. by the use of mentoring and close involvement in the staff development plan.
Academic Staff are over-worked. Work loads need to be reviewed and managed.	Develop an equitable and transparent workload model.	The PRG strongly endorsed the recommendation that academic workloads need to be reviewed and managed in a transparent manner.
Technical staff replacements.	Permanent replacement for Ms. Healy and resolution of workshop technician situation.	<p>The PRG felt that the ratio of technical to academic staff in the Department is relatively high. Additional technical staff should be part of grant proposals and funded in that way.</p> <p>The PRG recommended that the management structure of technical staff in the Department should be developed and then reviewed after a period of five years.</p>
Uncertainty about the roles of administrative staff, roles and specialisations of technical staff and their roles in research and teaching.	Define the roles and responsibilities of administrative and technical Staff.	<p>The PRG strongly recommended that the roles of administrative and technical staff are examined with urgency and decisions made within 6 months.</p> <p>The PRG suggested the increased use of administrative and technical support for the handling of grants and the ordering of consumables and equipment.</p>

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Lack of specialised training for Academic, Technical, Administrative and research staff and postgraduates.	Dedicated laboratory safety courses/risk analysis courses for postgraduates and specialist techniques training for all ZEPS personnel.	The PRG agreed and noted that there are some courses offered by the Department of HR. The PRG would encourage the University Health & Safety Office to put on courses to enable postgraduates to be trained in risk analysis, and laboratory and fieldwork safety training. The PRG suggested that part of the re-training of technical staff should be focussed on IT, to help provide the Department with support in this area.
No structured training in research tools, philosophy, IT, specialist software, etc.	Structured training for Postgraduate researchers.	The PRG strongly endorsed the provision of structured training for postgraduates. The PRG noted that the University has commenced the provision of some generic training for postgraduates across the University in areas such as IT, statistics and communication, all to a certain level. The University should also recognise the need to provide some specialised courses tailored to meet the needs of individual Departments, including ZEPS.
Communication is not good.	Establish an INTRANET (e.g. skills base), and appoint IT specialist for support.	The PRG noted the comment earlier re re-training of technical staff in IT.
Too much time taken to recruit staff.	Review recruitment and perhaps active retention policy for staff.	The PRG agreed and recommended consideration by University.
Too much time spent on administration and too little on research and teaching.	Reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and liberate Academic staff time to do academic business.	The PRG endorsed the recommendation for action and referred the Department to the comment on the earlier recommendation re the roles and duties of administrative staff and the need to define these clearly. If the Department has synergies in course provision there will be less assessment and more time freed for academic business.
Limited promotional opportunity for staff and difficulties for new staff, length of time for promotion process is too long.	Mentor staff to promote professional development and increase promotional opportunities and shorten process.	The PRG noted the changes in the promotion scheme approved by a recent Academic Council. The PRG strongly endorsed the need to mentor junior staff. There is a concern that more junior staff are not being positioned for promotion and taking over the research thrust of the Department.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Poor links/relations between some elements of ZEPS.	Active encouragement and engendering of better relations across Department.	The PRG noted that there are significant opportunities arising from the relocation of the Zoology section of the Department to the same site as the Plant Science section.
No technical staff promotion scheme.	Establish technician promotional scheme.	Noted. The PRG recommended that UCC acts on this issue.
Poor or unstructured sabbatical leave for staff.	Provide a structured system for organised sabbatical leave.	The PRG recommended that the Department should encourage staff to take advantage of the University sabbatical leave system. This should be incorporated into the strategic plan of the Department and linked to career development and mentoring.
Physical Building(s)		
Fragmentation and mixed quality of space (i.e. old Cooperage).	Reduce fragmentation by developing single ZEPS building and in the short term enhance the poor quality space in Cooperage.	The PRG noted that the recent move to new accommodation should have resolved this issue to a considerable degree. The facilities are now very good and are significantly better than many facilities for Departments of Zoology across Europe. The Cooperage has excellent volume of space, and has adequate space for postgraduates.
Uncertainty regarding ZEPS long-term Buildings.	Provide a full process for ZEPS to be engaged and develop ownership of long term planning in Distillery Fields.	The PRG recommended that the University commit to keeping the Department in its present facilities. The PRG considered the Cooperage to be ideal for aquaculture and research laboratories.
Distance between teaching spaces.	Develop quality teaching space on North Mall Campus.	The PRG noted that the Department now has quality teaching space on North Mall Campus and considered that the move to the new facility should reduce or eliminate many difficulties.
Lack of disability access to Enterprise Centre.	Remedy either by providing lift in Enterprise Centre or link with Butler Building.	The PRG noted that there is a real problem in regard to access for physically disabled. The PRG also noted plans for installing a bridge across from Butler Building

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Longer-term support of Lough Hyne.	Explore with Development Office long-term support for Lough Hyne.	The PRG strongly endorsed this recommendation and recommended negotiations be initiated with the Development Office to seek possibilities for funding. The PRG suggested that the possibility of using an alumni 'Friend of Lough Hyne' approach should be explored.
Access is often difficult: a serious problem for field based subjects.	24/7 access to ZEPS.	The PRG recognised the problem that research is not a 9-5 activity for staff and postgraduates. Access is thus necessary and should be especially recognised in the case that many zoological research projects need attention at unusual hours. The PRG noted that mechanisms are being put in place to alleviate this difficulty.
No storage space for research materials.	Establish ZEPS store.	The PRG noted access to portacabins and access to secure storage space for specimens. The PRG also noted that there are opportunities for development of storage space adjacent to the Enterprise Centre and recommended that these should be investigated.
Safety and security across entire ZEPS.	Ensure adequate security staff and guarantee a safe and secure environment.	The PRG hoped that the safety and security standards that apply to the main campus will apply to this facility as well.
Poor AV facilities in some ZEPS teaching spaces.	Ensure reliable and good quality AV in all university teaching space.	The PRG noted the presence of data projectors in every room in Enterprise Centre. The PRG were impressed at the level of AV support already in place in the new facility and would hope that it would continue to be supported.
Management/Administration		
Too many meetings.	Reduce the number of meetings, review management structure.	The PRG recommended a serious review of the management structures and systems to ensure translation of decisions into meaningful actions. The PRG indicated a need to delegate tasks.
No integrated Departmental Strategy.	Develop integrated ZEPS strategy.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation strongly. The PRG recommended that the management structure be reviewed with a view to developing an integrated Departmental strategy for the next five years. The PRG would encourage the Department to get a departmental strategy in place as an urgent priority.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Communication.	Increase communication in a structured way.	Endorsed.
Uncertainty about impact of university restructuring and concerns that it will bring yet another layer of administration.	That restructuring delivers a simpler, more supportive admin system.	The PRG noted that this is the aim of all!! The PRG noted the concerns of the staff – and considered that these are probably universal throughout the University.
Students paying for field work and lab manuals	All curricular activities should be fully subsidised by the university	The PRG noted that this issue was not raised by students. The Department Management Group should consider how the departmental funds could be used to support students on field trips.
Budget communication.	Provide a transparent resource allocation model for Department and how budget is spent.	The PRG considered that with the revision and definitions of the roles and functions of the management system within the Department these problems should be obviated.
No follow up action on issues.	Set an agenda for each issue and completion date and who is responsible. Devise a system to ensure task is completed.	PRG endorsed recommendation.
Some groups feeling excluded from decision-making.	Examine decision-making models and devise an inclusive, but effective model.	The PRG noted postdoctoral researchers are not represented at departmental management committee and recommended that postdoctoral researchers, technical and administrative staff be represented on the management group and on departmental committees.
Poor representation by some at college and faculty level.	Review the level of representation of staff on college and faculty membership and committees (e.g. technical, research staff).	The PRG noted and hoped that the issue will be addressed by revised managerial system in the Department.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Uncertainty about assets/equipment register and location.	Implement an assets register and one stop shop for equipment.	The PRG noted this recommendation and urges dept to regularise the situation in line with University requirements.
Teaching and Learning		
Uncertainty about Academic staff and Technical staff about prioritisation of teaching and assessment, in particular, deadlines and schedules.	Define or reassert ZEPS priorities to research led teaching and learning and develop schedules of practical/field work in partnership with technicians.	The PRG agreed and recommended that the academic staff committee should look closely at ensuring that academic and technical staff define what is needed for practical, fieldwork and assessment schedules.
Difficulty with enforcing plagiarism regulations.	Recommend that students be asked to submit declaration of 'non plagiarised work' as per UCD.	The PRG agreed with this recommendation.
Teaching equipment is old and of poor quality.	Devise a strategy for purchasing and maintaining teaching equipment.	The PRG agreed and supported this recommendation.
Double teaching and too much distant teaching.	Re-examine timetable to eliminate double teaching where possible and have lectures more closely scheduled.	The PRG were very concerned at the amount of double teaching undertaken by staff in the Department. In the current climate the Department is strongly advised to eliminate all double teaching where possible.
Demonstrating falls to a small number of postgraduates.	Explore possible role of 4 th Year students in demonstrating.	<p>The PRG were concerned that a small number of postgraduate students are carrying a high teaching load in order to fund their time as a student, and recommended that postgraduate stipends should be regularised.</p> <p>The PRG noted the benefit to 4th Year students and recommended that the Department should explore the possibility of extending the current PAL system with a view to inclusion of 4th Years in some demonstrating. PRG were concerned that some postgraduates are required to work for free.</p>

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Examinations: paper setting, choice, and number of questions in written and MCQ exams, double marking, moderating, etc.	Recommend assessment be outcomes based and the number of questions, paper setting and duration of exams be reviewed.	The PRG endorsed the departmental recommendation that methodologies for assessment be reviewed.
Importance of fieldwork.	Maintain the high field work content of curricula and perhaps increase its credit weighting to 10 credits to represent the real situation.	The PRG strongly endorsed this recommendation. PRG commended the Department on the fieldwork elements of their courses.
Too many modules/uneven teaching.	Review module overlap and number in light of workload model of 3-4 modules per staff.	The PRG agreed that teaching loads should be rationalised but recommended that projects be retained in Final Year. Teaching workloads should be transparent and equitable.
Little self-directed learning by students.	Greater consideration be given to self directed learning when reviewing modules.	PRG considered that some elements of self-directed learning are essential for development of students and agreed with the Department's recommendation.
Support for 4 th Year research projects and 3 rd Year literature projects may be dropping.	Recommend active support and facilitation of 3 rd and 4 th Year students with their research and literature projects.	The PRG strongly endorsed this recommendation. PRG recommended that the Department ensure that this support does not decrease.
Knowledge of graduate destinations patchy and scant.	More complete and systematic (every 5 years) survey of graduate destination.	The PRG agreed and recommended that the Department examine the reports of the Careers Service each year to develop a systematic understanding of the destination of the graduates.
Some uncertainty about the skills society/industry needs of our graduates.	A systematic (every 3 years) survey of graduate employers on skill sets/needs.	The PRG recommended strongly that this is done because the PRG, in discussion with stakeholders, heard the view expressed about the need for IT, communication, statistical skills and knowledge of regulatory legislation as areas that need addressing.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Poor understanding of student recruitment.	ZEPS become more proactive in student recruitment /marketing, web site, etc.	The PRG recommended that the Department examine the design of First and Second Year programmes with a view to attracting good quality students into the departmental programmes.
High student/staff ratio.	Reduce student/staff ratio.	The PRG reviewed the similar data for other departments in the Faculty of Science and found the student/staff ratio to be relatively low compared with cognate departments.
Research		
Low level of commercialisation and entrepreneurial skills in ZEPS.	Recommend graduates and staff take training in entrepreneurial skills.	The PRG noted the recommendation and considered that this might be an option for some individual postgraduates and staff.
Support for fieldwork poor, in particular vans and some consumables.	Review research support.	The PRG recommended that this is for departmental action
Uncertainty about insurance for fieldwork, particularly when by oneself.	Clarify insurance situation re fieldwork.	The PRG strongly endorsed this recommendation for immediate action by Department
Too little time for research.	Liberate academic staff from administrative duties and aim for higher research activity.	See comments made above.
Research participation by technicians low.	Enable technicians to participate more fully in research.	The PRG referred to recommendations above re the redefinition of roles and responsibilities of all administrative and technical staff.
Access.	24/7 research access.	This was commented on earlier in this Report. The PRG noted that access outside of normal working hours will be improved in the near future but that 24/7 access is a longer term issue.
Computer and other support from within grants.	PI checklist for all research grants be devised to ensure research needs are met.	The PRG endorsed this as an operational issue for Department to implement.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
Little structured training for post graduates.	Structured generic and specialist training for postgraduates.	The PRG strongly endorsed this.
Too little funding for postgraduates (and uncertainty about demonstrating pay).	Review postgraduates role in demonstrating, pay, schedules, timing hours, etc.	See comments above.
Uncertain links with Institutes.	Clarify the links with research institutes vis-à-vis overheads, space, etc.	The PRG recommended that the Department/University explore these issues.
Barriers to optimising research opportunities.	Recruit ZEPS project officer to support and develop research with staff.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation and recommended that links be established with the administrative support. The PRG noted the facilities and support offered by VP for Research.
Retention of research competencies in ZEPS is a problem as it often departs with graduates and postdoctoral researchers.	Ensure 'buddy system' or knowledge transfer system for research expertise.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation.
Poor/uncertain funding opportunities.	Optimise grant capture through across Department collaboration. Mixing demonstrating across ZEPS.	The PRG noted the success of the staff of the Department in attracting funds from a range of grant awarding bodies. Mentoring of junior staff in this area was recommended.
Loss of research competence.	Recommend that reference specimens from research projects be archived in Museum.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation.
Lack of career structure for Post Docs and Research Scientists.	Recommend the university develops and supports a research staff career structure.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation.

Issue	Departmental Recommendation for action	Comment/Recommendation of PRG
No enabling support for inter-institutional collaboration.	Recommend competitive or otherwise support for inter-institutional collaboration.	The PRG endorsed this recommendation.

Recommendations for improvement made by the Peer Review Group

The following recommendations incorporate the recommendations made by the Department and some additional recommendations by the PRG.

The PRG recommends

1. That the Department should aim to amalgamate modules with small numbers of students into modules that more students will take and also to rationalise the assessment to reduce the load on students and staff.
2. The development of a transparent workload model with rationalisation of academic workloads, including teaching, etc.
3. That the re-alignment of technical and administrative support in line with the merging of the two original Departments be completed.
4. That the University sabbatical leave system should be availed of, particularly by junior members of staff, to encourage their research and scholarly development.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Department of Zoology, Ecology & Plant Sciences

Monday 6th March 2006

- 18.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
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.
- 19.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

Tuesday 7th March 2006

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Meeting Room, Department of Zoology, Ecology & Plant Science, Distillery Fields, UCC

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

- 09.00 Professor John Davenport, Head of Department

- 09.30 Meeting with all staff of the Department

Venue: Lab 1, Butler Building, Distillery Fields

- 10.45 Meetings with members of staff

10.45 Professor John O'Halloran, *Chair, Coordinating Committee*

11.00 Mr Don Kelleher, *Senior Technician*

- 11.15 Representatives of 1st and 2nd Year Students

Eddie Farren, 1st year
Lyndsey Cummings, 1st year
Aisleigh Dorney, 1st year
Michael Flynn, 1st year
Tomas Barrett, 2nd year
Cian Gill, 2nd year
Karen Murphy, 2nd year
Maeve O'Rourke, 2nd year

- 11.35 Meetings with members of staff.

11.35 Ms Marian Murphy, *Administrative Assistant*

11.50 Dr Fidelma Butler, *Field Ecology Co-ordinator*

12.05 Dr Sarah Culloty, *Lecturer*

12.20 Professor Tom Cross, *Associate Professor*

12.35 Dr Emer Rogan, *Lecturer*

- 12.50 Ms Linda Drummond, *Half-time technician*
- 13.20 Professor Peter Kennedy, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- 13.40 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Visit to core facilities of Department. PRG escorted by Professors Davenport and O'Halloran
- 15.05 Meetings with members of staff
Professor Peter Jones, *Associate Professor*
- 15.20 Representatives of 3rd and 4th Year Students
Tom O'Donnell, 3rd Year
Tad Kirawoski, 3rd Year
Kieran Giller, 3rd Year
Elaine Gough, 4th Year
Cathriona Healy, 4th Year
Sile Molloy, 4th Year
- 15.50 Representatives of M.Sc. (taught and research) and PhD postgraduate Students
Tom Doyle, PhD 4
Moira McCarthy, MSc 1
Maev Boylan, PhD 1
Luca Mirimin, PhD 3
Barbara Emmerich, MSc 1
Eoin O'Callaghan, Taught MSc 1
Anne Reichget, Taught MSc 1
Jane Kavanagh, PhD 2
Mark Jessop, PhD 3
Brian O'Farrell, PhD 4
- 16.15 Representatives of Researchers/Postdoctoral Fellows
Dr. Eileen O'Herlihy
Dr. Eileen Dillane
Dr. Gerry Mousakitis
Dr. Sandra Irwin
Dr. Tom Gittings
Dr. Mark Wilson
- 17.00 Representatives of recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders
Dr Neil Stronnach, *Employer, Fota Wildlife Park*
Dr. Pam Byrne, *Employer, Department of Agriculture & Food*
Dr. Paul Galvin, *Employer, Tyndall Institute & Graduate*
Dr. Katherine Kelleher, *Graduate, Fehily Timoney & Co.*
Mr. Frank McMahon, *Graduate*
Mr. Patrick Roche, *Graduate*

Venue: Staff Common Room, Main Quadrangle, UCC

19.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day followed by a working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group.

Wednesday 8th March 2006

08.20 Convening of Peer Review Group in Meeting Room, Department of Zoology, Ecology & Plant Science, Distillery Fields, UCC

08.30 Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President

09.00 Dr. Alan Dobson, Director of the Environmental Research Institute

09.30 Professor Patrick Fitzpatrick, Head, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science

10.15 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Mr. Richard Bradfield, Science Librarian

11.15 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

11.30 Meetings with members of staff

11.30 Ms Ann Egan, *Executive Assistant*

11.45 Dr Rob McAllen, *Lecturer*

12.00 Dr Gavin Burnell, *Statutory Lecturer*

12.15 Mr. Ger Morgan, *Manager of the Aquatic Services Unit*

12.30 Professor John Davenport, Head of Department

13.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group

14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report

17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Unit by the international external member of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.

19.00 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

Thursday 9th March 2006

Externs depart