

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance  
Academic Year 2002/2003**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Accommodation and Student Activities Office**

7 March 2003

## **1. Introduction**

The Accommodation and Student Activities Office provides a range of accommodation services to existing and prospective UCC students, fosters student activities on campus (particularly by supporting student societies), promotes UCC conference facilities and co-ordinates Campus Watch. The office has a core staff of three and all are employees of UCC. The office is located at 6 Carrigside, College Road, adjacent to the main campus.

## **2. Members of the Peer Review Group**

Professor Charles Daly, Dean, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, UCC

Mr. Bruce Hamilton, Director of Memorial Union and Student Activities,

University of Rhode Island, USA

Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Student Affairs, DCU

Ms. Anne Mills, Admissions Officer, UCC (*Chair*)

## **3. Methodology**

The PRG commenced their three-day site visit on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The PRG acted as a team throughout, and drafted the report collectively. The PRG had been asked to conduct a review of four units:

- Accommodation and Student Activities Office
- Castlewhite Apartments
- Student Centre
- UCC Students Union

Initially it had been intended that a single PRG Report would be completed encompassing all four units. However, in the course of the site visit it became apparent that a single report would be inappropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the employment status of the staff was not consistent across all four units. Secondly, the units do not form a single entity or report to a single person. Thirdly, the units did not have sight of the other three Self-Assessment Reports prior to their submission, so it seemed meaningless to provide feedback to a unit

on any report other than its own. Therefore the PRG agreed that it would prepare four PRG Reports instead of one.

#### **4. Timetable of the site visit**

The final timetable of the site visit is presented in *Appendix 1*. The provisional timetable was altered during the course of the site visit at the request of the Peer Review Group (PRG) to allow for the inclusion of other members of staff. In addition some members of staff requested individual meetings and these were accommodated by the PRG. While the timetable was very full the combination of individual meetings and group meetings worked well. Given the complex nature of the units under review, additional time for drafting the PRG Report would have been beneficial.

#### **5. PRG comments on the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report**

At the outset the PRG would like to acknowledge the considerable amount of work undertaken by the Accommodation and Student Activities Office in preparing their Self-Assessment Report.

The SWOT analysis was very thorough and was enhanced by the inclusion of an Action Plan. It was excellent that the whole team, staff and students, participated in the SWOT analysis. The Benchmarking exercise was comprehensive and provided a good overview of the relative position of the office as compared with other Irish Universities. The Office did a very thorough job on the audit of internal and external users of the service.

#### **6. PRG comments on the content of the Self- Assessment Report**

The Self-Assessment Report was well prepared and presented, and represented a fair assessment of the Accommodation and Student Activities Office.

The SWOT analysis was confirmed as accurate and during the review it was noted that some of the cost neutral issues identified during the SWOT analysis have already been addressed. The Benchmarking was impressive and highlighted the under provision of UCC owned or managed accommodation. The Benchmarking and review exercise confirmed that the UCC Accommodation and Student

Activities Office compares well with similar functions in other Universities. The Service Standards of the unit received some analysis in the report. The PRG noted that the unit had also developed Service Level Agreements with associated services providers in UCC.

A good audit of internal and external users of the service was undertaken and responses were very favourable. While copies of the staff questionnaires used were included, the PRG felt that the report would have been enhanced by the inclusion of completed staff questionnaires.

## **7. Findings of the Peer Review Group**

The Peer Review Group was very impressed with this unit and the manner in which its very committed hard working staff carry out its four core functions (accommodations, societies, conferencing and Campus Watch). The unit has managed to achieve a high level of achievement with their limited resources and have managed to balance their disparate functions throughout the calendar year. While not directly comparable to structures in other universities, it compares favourably with units carrying out similar functions in other institutions.

The unit showed considerable empathy with their brief of providing a service that contributes to the University mission of improving the quality of the student experience. The unit has a good philosophy based on the principle of student development and has been very supportive to Non-EU students.

The level of interactions with user groups and the wider community through Campus Watch, contact with community groups and providers of accommodation particularly impressed the PRG. Their good working relationships with other Units and Departments in UCC was evident in the surveys and in their ability to negotiate Service Level Agreements with a number of other internal service providers. Members of staff of the Accommodation and Student Activities Office are regarded as hardworking, friendly and caring and are perceived to operate well as a team.

## 8. PRG comments on recommendations in the Self-Assessment Report

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Appointment of additional staff for conferencing and interaction with overseas students	The PRG endorse this proposal and would recommend a three- year appointment as a single post to fulfil both functions. On the conferences side the PRG would recommend that the job description be carefully considered (particularly as there seems to be some divergence regarding whether this is primarily a marketing function or a conference support one), and the details of the service should be disseminated more widely to UCC staff given the stated emphasis on academically based conference business.	HoD Deans-EMG
Upgrading of website	The PRG endorse this proposal	HoD
Establishment of a Housing Forum	The PRG endorses the proposal to establishment of a Housing Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to develop housing policy</li> <li>• to improve communication between the Accommodation and Student Activities Office, Castlewhite Apartments and additional accommodation providers</li> <li>• to improve the student experience of campus life.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Joint Board EMG
Budget for Regular up-date of publications	The PRG found this proposal too vague to endorse without comment. The PRG believes this unit to be under-resourced, as a result of the low base at which the budget of this unit was set, and recommend consideration of the issue by the appropriate university body. The PRG recommend that this review of non- pay budget should make particular reference to publications.	HoD Deans-EMG

## 9. Additional Recommendations of the PRG

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Contribution to UCC Accommodation Policy	The PRG recommends that the valuable potential role of the unit in contributing to University Accommodation Policy be more fully utilised.	Vice-President for Finance & Administration

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Campus Watch	The PRG recommends that the current strong community involvement through Campus Watch be developed further in the context of expanding student numbers.	HoD
Development of Operational Manuals	The PRG recommends the widespread development of operational manuals as good practice, to allow for the absence of staff members and smooth transition in the event of staff turnover.	HoD
Potential for cost savings on publications	The PRG recommends that the unit better utilise opportunities to be included in other University publications e.g. Undergraduate CD Rom produced by the Admissions Office.	HoD
Greater use of IT	The PRG recommends the continued and enhanced use of IT to help improve provision of information on the services and to support student activities. However, it is vital that the 'personal touch' is maintained in association with the greater use of technology.	HoD
Proposals for HEA Targeted funding	The PRG recommends that consideration be given to the preparation of proposals for any relevant categories in the next round of HEA Targeted Initiatives.	HoD
Provision of emergency accommodation	The PRG recommends that once the Housing Forum has been established that it consider provision of emergency accommodation.	HoD

## Recommendations with wider UCC implications

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Quality of the Student Experience	<p>A constant theme that emerged during the review was the need to address the quality of the student experience. The types of factors that were considered to negatively impact on the current student experience included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The high level of teaching</li> <li>• The level of examining (both formal and continuous assessment)</li> <li>• The restructuring of the teaching periods</li> </ul> <p>Particular concerns were raised in relation to the impact of modularisation on the first year student experience.</p> <p>These changes are perceived to have reduced the level of student participation in college activities including societies and Students Union involvement.</p> <p>The PRG recommends a major review to assess whether this is in fact the case and to identify actions needed.</p>	<p>Joint Board Deans SNCDC Chaplaincy</p>
Integration of Student Services	<p>During meetings with stakeholders the desirability of moving towards a more integrated structure for student services was mentioned on many occasions. The need for communication, role clarification, more formalised operating procedures and access to information as the scale of operations is increasing was recognised. In this context the units valued the Student Services Management Group (SSMG) as a resource for sharing information and providing support.</p> <p>The PRG, while realising the resource implications, recommends the consideration of a single reporting relationship to a Senior Officer whose main responsibility would be student affairs with a view to strengthening links between student services and academic staff by providing significant insights into the context of student learning.</p>	EMG

The PRG would like to thank the staff of the Accommodation and Student Activities Office for their excellent work in preparing for this review, and for their participation during the site visit. The final report of the PRG is based on the recommendations in the Self-Assessment Report, discussions with staff and users of the service and guidelines provided by the Quality Promotion Unit.

The PRG would like to offer their special thanks to Dr. Norma Ryan, Ms Helen Buckley and Ms Aoife Ní Néill of the Quality Promotion Unit for their support and hospitality during the site visit.

## **Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Group Visit**

### **Accommodations Office & Student Activities Castlewhite Apartments Student Centre Students' Union**

#### **Tuesday 04 February 2003**

- 12.30 – 14.00 Informal lunch for members of Peer Review Group in Staff Dining Room, UCC, hosted by Dr. N. Ryan
- 14.00 – 16.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group  
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.  
Group agreed final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.  
Views were exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored were identified.  
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 16.00 – 18.00 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs
- Meetings with Heads of Units*
- 16.00 Pauline Gilheany, Manager, Castlewhite Apartments  
16.30 Donnchadh O hAodha, General Manager, Student Centre  
17.00 Maura O'Neill, Head, Accommodation Office  
17.30 Tommy Reidy, President of Students Union
- 20.00 – 22.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, and Heads of Units (Pauline Gilheany, Donnchadh O hAodha, Maura O'Neill, Tommy Reidy)

#### **Wednesday 05 February 2003**

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group  
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 09.00 – 12.30 Continuation of consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all unit staff, including administrative and technical staff, as appropriate. Time was allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.
- 09.00 *Staff of Castlewhite Apartments*  
Helen McGrath  
Anne Sheehan
- 09.45 *Staff of Accommodation Office*

Eileen Brady, Executive Assistant (job share)  
Denis McDonald, Assistant Accommodation Officer  
Grainne Murphy, Student help  
Susan Shanahan, Senior Executive Assistant (job share)

10.30 Coffee

11.00 *Sabbatical Officers and staff of Students Union*

Fidelma Burnell, Secretary  
Lorraine Clifford, Irish Officer, SU  
Michelle Healy, Projects Officer, SU  
Avril Mulcahy, Entertainment Officer, SU  
Caoimh Ni hAnnrachain, Publications Officer, SU  
Bernadette O'Sullivan, Postgraduates Officer, SU  
JP Quinn, President, Societies Guild  
Tommy Reidy, President, Students Union  
Esther Walsh, Chair, Class Council

*Individual meetings were held with*

Lorraine Clifford, Irish Officer, SU  
Caoimh Ni hAnnrachain, Publications Officer, SU  
Avril Mulcahy, Entertainment Officer, SU

11.45 *Staff of Student Centre*

Terrie Burke, Commercial Manager  
Liz Carroll, Facility Service Manager  
Georgina Cronin, Deputy General Manager  
Finola Crowley, Payroll Administrator  
Conor Enright, Student Bar Staff  
Orla Fitzgerald, Travel Office Supervisor  
Shirley Ismail, Administrative Assistant  
Nuala McCarthy, Coffee Shop Supervisor  
Rob Kelly, Student Manager  
Fiona Meaney, Shops Supervisor  
Denise O'Keeffe, Shops Manager  
Selena O'Keeffe, Student Manager

12.30 – 13.30 Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group

13.30 – 14.45 Visit to core facilities of Units:

PRG were shown around Student Centre by Donnchadh O'hAodha.  
Anne Mills brought the group from Student Centre to Students Union  
Offices and Accommodations Office on College Road and then to  
Castlewhite Apartments

*Staff of Student Centre*

14.45 Vincent O'Brien, Student Centre

14.55 Grainne Thompson, Student Centre

15.00 – 17.00 Meeting with representative selections of staff and users of the services

provided by the units concerned, including students and staff of UCC

15.00 Kieran Dowd, Head, Physical Education & Sport  
Seamus McEvoy, Head, Careers Service  
Mary O'Grady, Head, Disability Office

15.30 Dr. Catherine O'Riordan, Head, Student Health & Counselling  
Fr. Michael Regan, Chaplaincy

16.00 *Meeting with representatives of students*  
Melanie Dunphy  
Eamonn Harrington  
Donal Holohan  
Eugene Murphy  
Deirdre O'Sullivan  
Benjamin Thomson

16.30 *Meeting with representative selection of staff*  
Dr. Bettie Higgs, Department of Geology  
Dr. Edel Barnes, Department of Accounting, Finance &  
Information Systems

17.00 – 18.30 Reception in Staff Common Room with:

*Ex-sabbatical Officers of the Students Union*  
John Coughlan, ex-Publications Officer, SU  
Paul Kearney, ex-President of Students Union  
Phil O'Callaghan, ex-Welfare Officer, SU  
Andrew O'Leary, Athletics Union  
Maura Lyons, Entertainments Officer 2001/02

*Members of Students Guild*  
Paddy Clifford  
JP Quinn, Society's Guild/ Student Societies  
Tommy Reidy  
Richard Whelan

*Representatives of Apartment complexes*  
Josephine Corbette, Leaside Apartments, Bachelors Quay, Cork  
Miriam Ryan, Brookfield, College Road

*Former staff of the Student Centre:*  
Ger Barry, Former Shops Manager  
Mike Geary, former Student Manager

*Nominated by Castlewhite Apartments*  
Denis MacDonald, Accommodations Office  
Pol Ruiseal, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha

Fr. Michael Regan, Chaplain

19.30 – 23.45 Working dinner for members for the Peer Review Group

### **Thursday 06 February 2003**

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group  
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 09.00 – 09.30 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President and member of Executive Management Group
- 09.30 – 10.00 Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/Vice-President for Finance & Administration
- 10.00 – 10.30 Dr. Colm O'Sullivan, Chair, Students Needs & Curriculum Development Committee (SNCDC)
- 10.30 – 10.45 Coffee
- 10.45 – 11.15 Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- 11.15 – 11.30 Dr. John Tyrell, member of Joint Board
- 11.30 – 13.15 Meetings with Heads of units to clarify any remaining issues
- 11.30 Pauline Gilheany, Manager, Castlewhite Apartments
  - 11.45 Donnchadh O hAodha, General Manager, Student Centre
  - 12.15 Maura O'Neill, Head, Accommodation Office
  - 12.45 Tommy Reidy, President of Students Union
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group, with Mr. Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- 14.00 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Units by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. (Note: this presentation was not for discussion by the members of the units)  
Venue: Beara Room, Student Centre
- 19.00 – 00.30 Working 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.

### **Friday 07 February 2003**

Externs departed