

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

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

**Peer Review Group Report**

**UCC Castlewhite Apartments**

**Confidential**

7 March 2003

## **1. Introduction**

UCC Castlewhite Apartments was built in 1991 and consists of 63 apartments and 278 rooms in total. The apartments consist of 3,4,5,or 6 bedrooms nearly all of which are single occupancy. In each apartment there is a bathroom, fitted kitchen and living area. The unit has a core staff of three, all of whom are employed by Castlewhite Apartments.

## **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**

The PRG considered the Self-Assessment Report to be adequate but it would have benefited from wider staff consultation, Castlewhite staff evaluation reports and more extensive input from the users i.e. students. The SWOT Analysis was acceptable but the Benchmarking was rather cursory and essentially anecdotal. The Report did not comment on their Service Standards nor was there any financial information provided. The lack of financial information was a key omission that hampered the review of the unit, given its strong business function.

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

The PRG confirmed the content of the SWOT and the issues raised were reflected in various meetings. It was noted that some of the cost neutral issues identified had already been implemented. There was a realistic interpretation of their position. Comparisons with similar schemes in other universities were difficult given the relative size of this complex and the absence of financial information. The PRG commend Castlewhite on current discussions to improve the accommodation facilities available to students with disabilities.

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

The PRG recognised the importance of Castlewhite Apartments as UCC's only onsite campus accommodation. Given the intended expansion of UCC managed accommodation, Castlewhite Apartments staff accepts the need for a move to

more formal policies. The PRG acknowledges the good informal relations that Castlewhite Apartments has with its residents. In particular, Castlewhite Apartments make special arrangements on behalf of Irish-speaking students and Non-EU students.

#### 8. PRG Comments on the recommendations of the Self-Assessment Report

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Rolling refurbishment and upgrading	PRG endorses this recommendation and recommends that plans commence immediately consistent with available resources (details of which were not available to the PRG)	Manager Board
To conduct a systematic annual survey of residents at an appropriate time.	The PRG endorses this recommendation	Manager
To strive for better communication within the campus.	The PRG endorses this recommendation and notes the desire for better communication with the Finance Office	Manager
Recommendations relating to ongoing maintenance and security.	The PRG endorses this recommendation	Manager Board

#### 9. Additional recommendations of the PRG

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Expansion of UCC managed Accommodation	Recommend early clarification of developments regarding the expansion of UCC managed accommodation. In addition, Castlewhite Apartments staff need to fully advised and involved regarding their role in the extended UCC managed accommodations.	Board Manager

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment from PRG</b>	<b>Action</b>
Establishment of a Housing Forum	<p>The PRG recommends the establishment of a Housing Forum to develop housing policy and to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication between Castlewhite Apartments, additional accommodation providers and the Accommodation and Student Activities Office.</li> <li>• Improve the student experience of campus life.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p>Joint Board</p> <p>EMG</p>
The Inclusion of the Manager of Castlewhite Apartments in the SSMG	The PRG recommends the inclusion of the Manager of Castlewhite Apartments in the Students Services Management Group (SSMG )	SSMG
Development of Operational Manuals	The PRG recommends the widespread development of operational manuals as good practice, to allow for the absence of staff members, smooth transition in the event of staff turnover and efficiency and consistency as the scale of operation increases.	Manager
Financial Transparency	PRG recommends corporate financial transparency, including management costs, and clarity on the nature of the separate identity of UCC Castlewhite Apartments as a company. The PRG noted that complete financial separation would lead to less confusion with regard to employment terms and conditions for staff.	Board
Review of Room Allocation policy	The PRG recommends an early review of the current room allocation policy.	<p>Manager</p> <p>Board</p>
'Castlewhite Shop'	The PRG recommends improved communication between Castlewhite Apartments and the Student Centre regarding the service available to students from the 'Castlewhite Shop'.	

## 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. 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</p> <p>Deans</p> <p>SNCDC</p> <p>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 UCC Castlewhite Apartments 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: Múscaí 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: Múscaí 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