

University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

International Education Office

Academic Year 2000/2001

Members of the Peer Review Group

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
1. Dr Tom Barron	International Office, University of Edinburgh
2. Ms Melanie Kilduff	International Officer, NUI Maynooth
3. Mr Michael O'Sullivan	Vice-President - Planning, Communications & Development, UCC
4. Dr Margaret Connolly	Department of English, UCC

Timetable of the site visit

[Norma to include timetable]

The timetable provided sufficient time for a thorough review. To eliminate unnecessary duplication, more use might have been made of small-group meetings, rather than a lengthy series of individual consultations with students and staff.

Peer Review

Methodology

The Peer Review Group acted as a team throughout, and drafted the report collectively.

Self-Assessment Report

The report was extremely useful for the Peer Review Group. It represents an honest assessment of the International Education Office and a critical analysis of its activities. The report contains some cost-neutral proposals which can be, or in some cases have been, implemented by the International Education Office. The Peer Review Group fully endorse these proposals.

The report refers to the ambitious expansion of the JYA programme as outlined in the University's Strategic Plan, but does not identify the resource implications for the International Education Office which the achievement of this targeted increase in student numbers will necessitate.

Findings of the Peer Review Group

1. Extremely positive feedback was received from students and academic staff about the International Education Office. The staff of the International Education Office are regarded as hardworking, efficient, effective, friendly and caring; they are perceived to operate well as a team.
2. The Self-Assessment Report is a very helpful and good quality document, and in the main covers the issues which the department was asked to address.
3. It is the view of the Peer Review Group that the staff of the International Education Office are already working at full capacity. The Peer Review Group have concerns with regard to the staffing structure, and support the view that there is a need for additional senior staff if the

expansion in numbers envisaged by the university is to be achieved without diminishing quality. The anticipated increase in student numbers will also have an impact on the requirements for administrative support within the office.

4. The physical space allocated to the International Education Office is inadequate. Pressure on space has resulted in an acceptance of what appears to visitors to be a cluttered main office. It is important that the International Education Office presents a professional image to its clients.
5. Whilst we recognise that there are overall limitations on space within UCC, a more prominent, accessible and spacious location is required if the International Education Office is to cater for increased student numbers and allow for a concomitant increase in staffing. In the short term, the situation of the International Education Office could be helped by improved signage.
6. The feedback from students indicates that the web (and not booklets) is the primary mechanism for accessing information about UCC and its programmes, and we therefore support the view that training in IT skills is crucial for staff of the International Education Office .
7. We are impressed by the level of pastoral care provided by the International Education Office to both incoming and outgoing students. We would emphasise, however, that the first two months' placement is a critical time, and that contact should be made during this period with all UCC students placed abroad.
8. For both incoming and outgoing students accommodation is a major issue. Incoming students expressed a clear preference for accommodation which integrates international and Irish students. whilst accommodation is not within the remit of the International Education Office, it is directly relevant to the quality of the student experience. For this reason this matter should be raised with the appropriate offices in UCC.
9. The Peer Review Group considers that in the case of the International Education Office the process of self analysis has been very beneficial; accordingly we suggest that this process be continued on a regular basis rather than be linked to a QA timetable.

Overall Analysis

In the opinion of the Peer Review Group the analysis of strengths and weaknesses contained within the Self-Assessment Report represents a fair and balanced assessment. An analysis of opportunities and threats was not included in the Report.

Though the market for JYA students remains extremely competitive, the proven expertise of the International Education Office gives confidence that the targeted numbers can be realised. However, the successful achievement of this aim depends upon a recognition on the part of the university that resources must be provided in advance to support the necessary marketing initiatives.

Recommendations for Improvement

As outlined above the Peer Review Group fully endorses the recommendations contained within the Self-Assessment Report. The additional recommendations of the Peer Review Group are as follows:

1. The role and benefits to the International Education Office of the new International Education Committee should be agreed and explained. It may be appropriate to consider including student representation on the Committee.
2. The International Education Office should take steps to enhance its profile on campus.

3. The issue of the distribution of income and incentive measures should be addressed. The International Education Office should benefit from some of the revenues earned through the JYA programme. In particular it is recommended that a degree of flexibility in funding allocations be introduced to allow the International Education Office to bring the university's best academic staff to visit partner and target institutions.
4. There should be a consistent policy regarding the financial arrangements for the Early-Start programmes.
5. In the year prior to their departure outgoing Socrates students should be introduced to visiting students at UCC from their host institution. This may help minimise the problems encountered by students on arrival at the host institution.
6. When dealing with new Socrates partners, the International Education Office should seek detailed information from other institutions which have established links with those partners.
7. In the overall context of UCC's recruitment of international students (both JYA and full-degree programmes), there may be opportunities for increased co-ordination, thereby exploiting to the fullest extent the undoubted expertise of the International Education Office .