

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

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

Peer Review Group Report

UCC Students Union

7 March 2003

1. Introduction

The UCC Students Union is the sole representative body for students in UCC. Students automatically become members of the Union when they register for their programme of study. There are 11 officers of the Students Union, three sabbatical officers and eight non-sabbatical officers. The three sabbatical officers, namely the President, Deputy President Education, and Deputy President Welfare are full-time officers who are paid by UCC to represent the student body both internally and externally. The non-sabbatical officers, namely Entertainments, Publications, Projects, Postgraduate, Irish, President of the Athletic Union, President of the Societies Guild and Class Council Chair, are part-time officers and they continue with their studies while holding their officer posts.

The Students Union also has an Administrative Officer, who concurrently holds the position of General Manager of the Student Centre, and a part-time Secretary. At the time of the review the Students Union Offices were based at 4 Carrigside, College Road but were scheduled to move to the Student Centre.

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 Peer Review Group (PRG) commenced their three-day site visit on Tuesday 4th 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 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

There were two components to the Self-Assessment. A main report prepared by the 2001/2002 Executive and a supplementary report prepared by the 2002/2003 Executive.

The SWOT analysis was very helpful to the PRG in the review of the Students Union. The PRG felt the Self-Assessment did not ascertain the views of the student body. There was a total dependence on a college-wide Quality Assurance Survey that sought to highlight *areas of dissatisfaction among the students of UCC*, but did not address their views of the Students Union *per se*.

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

The Swot Analysis highlighted some necessary internal review of structures and the PRG commends the Students Union for already having acted upon these recommendations with a view to putting proposals to a student referendum. The

Benchmarking exercise was cursory and mainly anecdotal. The absence of appropriate surveys of the student body or staff (the Executive, Administrative Officer and Secretary) was a major flaw in the Report.

Overall the PRG group found the Self-Assessment Report to be somewhat inadequate.

7. Findings of the Peer Review Group

The PRG was very impressed by the energy and commitment of the Executive of the Students Union and their enthusiasm in wishing to meet the challenges presented by a diverse student body. In addition, in all of the meetings it was clear that there continues to be a genuine commitment in UCC to the tradition of productively working with the student body through the offices of the Students Union.

The PRG recognised the need of the Students Union for good and timely information, including financial information, to allow them to effectively fulfil their roles.

Three general issues relevant to the internal functioning of the Students Union emerged during the review and, in particular, during the interviews with staff and students. Firstly, there is a need for an internal review of structures, already acted upon by the Students Union and currently being considered by the Joint Board. Secondly, good crossover training for the non-sabbatical as well as the sabbatical officers needs to be addressed. Thirdly, realistic expectations of the posts of non-sabbatical officers and time management guidelines need to be developed.

Additional concerns were raised with regard to a sense of ownership of the Student Centre, the dual mandate role of the Administrative Officer of the Students Union / General Manager of the Student Centre, the desire for better information and communication flow, the role of the Advisory Board and the assignment of Students Union office space in the Student Centre.

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

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Review of internal structure of Students Union Executive	The PRG endorses this proposal and noted that some recommendations have been activated (e.g. extra sabbatical officer, constitutional review and more power to class council).	Executive Joint Board
Recommendation for Increased Funding	Due to the lack of financial information the PRG were not in a position to endorse the recommendations relating to increased funding.	
Greater involvement of the Students Union in the management of the Student Centre.	The PRG would not endorse the recommendation for greater involvement by the SU in the operational management of the Student Centre. However the PRG recognises the need for better communication between the Student Union and the Student Centre.	General Manager Student Centre

9. Additional recommendations of the PRG

In addition to the above recommendations, the PRG also makes the following recommendations. These are also included in the PRG Report on the Student Centre in the context of its close interaction with the Students Union and the dual mandate of the Administrative Officer of Students Union/General Manager of Student Centre.

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
<p>Dual mandate of the Administrative officer of the Students Union. <i>(as raised during the Review process).</i></p>	<p>The PRG recognise the importance of further dialogue regarding the dual mandate of the Administrative Officer of the Students Union who concurrently fulfils the role of General Manager of the Student Centre. In this context the option of using a facilitator might be considered. Should a decision to split the functions be reached it would be important to carefully consider the job specification and the reporting relationships of the Administrative Officer of the Student Union and how that function will relate to the General Manager of the Student Centre.</p> <p>If the dual mandate is maintained then issues regarding workload and working relationships should be addressed.</p>	UCC
<p>Role of Student Centre Advisory Board</p>	<p>The PRG endorses the Student Centre Advisory Board as having a policy role rather than an operational role. However, some forum to discuss operational issues of common interest is worthy of consideration.</p>	Student Centre Advisory Board
<p>Proposed Students Union Office Space in Student Centre.</p>	<p>The PRG noted that factors such as confidentiality, out-of-hours access and security are important factors in considering space for the Students Union. The PRG recommends the need for frank, realistic and fair discussions on Students Union Office accommodation to take place and that the issue must be resolved. This may need to be facilitated by a third party.</p> <p>The PRG gave considerable time and thought to this issue, and discussed various options including the Students Union remaining in their present premises (which would entail refurbishment of those premises), but did not feel it was appropriate to make a definite recommendation.</p>	General Manager Student Centre and President Students Union

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Wider use of the Multi-function Hall	The PRG, while recognising the need to preserve the quality of the Multi-function Hall, recommends that consideration be given to the wider use of the Hall on a trial basis.	Advisory Board
Communication and information flow on key areas of interaction between the Students Union and the Student Centre	<p>The PRG Group recommends that better communication in key areas of interaction (such as Entertainment, support for Irish, Publications and Advertising) between the Students Union and the Student Centre be developed.</p> <p>With regard to Advertising, the PRG recommends that there be absolute clarity regarding the distinct and separate identities of the Students Union and the Student Centre when either of these entities is dealing with potential advertisers.</p>	General Manager Student Centre President Students Union
Students Union need for financial information on SU and all financial information necessary to assist SU in decision-making with respect to their own functions	The PRG recommends that the Students Union be provided with good and timely information (including financial and pricing policy)	General Manager Student Centre
Commercial operations	The PRG recommends that a periodic review of the performance of commercial operations be undertaken. Particular attention should be devoted to UCC Travel in the context of its high turnover.	Advisory Board Student Centre EMG
UCC Crèche	The PRG recommends that priority be given to the early development of the proposed enlarged crèche.	EMG
Greater crossover training and support	The PRG recommends that there is greater crossover training and support for Sabbatical Officers (13 month contracts) and for non-sabbatical staff. This should also involve the provision of standard operating procedures manuals and good briefing notes.	President Students Union

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Non-sabbatical posts	The PRG recommends that there would be realistic expectations of holders of non-sabbatical posts and that time management advice made available to students in these posts.	President Students Union
Recognition for Student Leadership	The PRG recommends the development of extra-curricular activity awards to recognise leadership among the student body.	Joint Board
Status of the Student Centre	The PRG Group was unclear about the status of the Student Centre and its legal relationship with UCC and suggests that the advisability of creating a company be considered.	EMG

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"> • The high level of teaching • The level of examining (both formal and continuous assessment) • The restructuring of the teaching periods <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>	Joint Board Deans SNCDC Chaplaincy

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
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 Students Union for their 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, Leeside 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: Múscaí 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