

## **Students Union**

### *Peer Review Group:*

Ms. A. Mills, Admissions Officer, UCC (Chair)  
Professor C. Daly, Dean, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, UCC  
Mr. B. Kehoe, Director of Student Affairs, DCU  
Mr. B. Hamilton, Director of Memorial Union and Student Activities, University of Rhode Island, USA

### *Brief description of conduct of site visit*

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> February 2003 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually
- ii) Representatives of students
- iii) Representatives of staff of the University
- iv) Representatives of past graduates,
- v) Representatives of the Trade Union bodies and IBEC
- vi) Professor A. Hyland, VP
- vii) Mr. M. F. Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/VP for Administration & Finance
- viii) Dr. C. O'Sullivan, Chair, Student Needs & Curriculum Development Committee
- ix) Mr. M. Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- x) Dr. John Tyrrell, Representing the Joint Board

and visits to unit facilities in UCC.

An exit presentation of the principal findings of the Peer Review Group was made to staff of the department in the afternoon of the second day.

## **Description of Students Union**

*President of Union:* Mr. T. Reidy

*Executive Committee:* 11 members, including 2 full-time sabbatical officers

*Location of Union:* Áras na MacLéinn

### *Functions*

- Representing the students of UCC on various committees within and outside the university
- Forming a communication link between the students and the university.
- To support students experiencing financial, emotional or educational difficulties
- To disseminate information
- To organise events of social, cultural educational benefit to students
- To provide services to aid students in a variety of situations
- To lobby the university for better provision of services for students
- To defend and promote all democratic and human rights.

## **General Comment on Quality Review**

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.

The Swot Analysis highlighted some necessary internal review of structures and the PRG commended 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.

The PRG was very impressed by the energy and commitment of the Executive of the Students Union and their enthusiasm in wishing to the 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.

## **Progress on Implementation of Recommendations for Improvement**

### Abbreviations

*PRG: Peer Review Group*

*VP: Vice-President*

*QPC: Quality Promotion Committee*

*EMG: Executive Management Group*

*SU: Students Union*

*SC: Student Centre*

*SAR: Self-Assessment Report*

<b>Recommendation of PRG</b>	<b>Recommendation of the QPC</b>	<b>Follow-up Report October 2004</b>
That a review of internal	Recommendations/ and	Completed.

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structure of SU Executive be carried out.	comments of the QPC on most recommendations were postponed pending the report of the consultant (see below).	The new structures agreed following the review are now in place. A fourth sabbatical officer position was approved and filled for 2004/05.
That better communication between the SU and the SC be put in place.		This is on-going.
<p>The PRG recognised the importance of further dialogue regarding the dual mandate of the General Manager. In this context the option of using a facilitator might be considered.</p> <p>(a) Should the functions be split in the future 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 SC.</p> <p>(b) Should the dual mandate be maintained then issues regarding workload and working relationships should be addressed.</p>		<p>Implemented.</p> <p>A post of Administrative Officer for the Students Union was approved by the university and the successful applicant for the post is due to take up the position in Jan '05.</p>
The PRG endorsed the SC 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>A Policy Board for the Student Centre has been re-activated and has met twice this session. Three representatives of the SU are on the Board, which is chaired by Professor C. O'Sullivan, and includes representatives of the Finance Office and the Administrative Officer of the SU and the General Manager of the SC.</p>
Recommended the need for frank, realistic and fair discussions on SU Office Space in SC to take place and that the		Office accommodation in the SC has been allocated to the SU. With the enlargement of the number of sabbatical

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issue must be resolved.		officer positions it is now not adequate and is also not very good quality space. The issue of the future accommodation of the sabbatical officers and staff of the SU needs to be kept under consideration. Additionally there is a real need for some accommodation for Student Societies.
That consideration be given to the wider use of the Multifunctional Hall on a trial basis, while mindful of the need to preserve the quality of the Hall.		The use of the Devere Hall has expanded. It is also an issue that will be considered by the SC Policy Board in 2004/05.
That better communication in key areas of interaction (such as Entertainment, support for Irish, Publications and Advertising) between the SU and the SC be developed.  With regard to Advertising, the PRG recommended that there be absolute clarity regarding the distinct and separate identities of the SU and the SC when either of these entities is dealing with potential advertisers.		This issue has been considered by the Administrative Secretary and the SU. The situation has been clarified: the publications are the responsibility of the SU and the Student publication Xpress is produced independently by the SU.
That the SU be provided with good and timely information (including financial and pricing policy) necessary to assist SU in decision-making with respect to their own functions.		The Secretary & Bursar will discuss the issues with the President of the SU. The situation will be greatly improved once the Administrative Officer for the SU is in post.  Pricing policies/changes will, in future, be brought to the SC Policy Board.
That a periodic review of the performance of commercial operations be undertaken. Particular attention should be devoted to UCC Travel in the		This will be undertaken by the SC Policy Board. SU is responsible only for the SU Bookshop.

<b>Recommendation of PRG</b>	<b>Recommendation of the QPC</b>	<b>Follow-up Report October 2004</b>
context of its high turnover.		
That priority be given to the early development of the proposed enlarged UCC crèche.		Implemented.  A new crèche facility has been incorporated into the Brookfield Campus and is expected to be completed by end of March 2005.
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.		Implemented in full.
That there should be realistic expectations of holders of non-sabbatical posts and that time management advice made available to students in these posts.		Improvements have been made to the situation. Further possibilities will be considered in 04/05. In particular the responsibilities of the Entertainments Officer post-holder will be actively considered.
PRG recommended the development of extra-curricular activity awards to recognise leadership among the student body.		Underway. The implementation of the Diploma Supplement will go some way towards recognising contributions and leadership. Discussions on the issue are on-going with the Athletic Union and the Guild.
PRG was unclear about the status of the SC and its legal relationship with UCC and suggested that the advisability of creating a company be considered.		It has been decided no to create a company at the present time.
That a major review be undertaken to assess whether the overall quality of the student experience and the level	QPC recommended that each of the three Units (excluding Castlewhite Apartments) should be approached and	The issue of the student experience and student 'apathy' is a very broad one. It has been considered at joint

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of student participation in college activities including societies and SU involvement has decreased. That the factors involved in such a decrease, if existing, be considered and necessary actions identified.	their views sought regarding a review of their section. Proposals should be submitted to the QPC and the QPC would then decide upon the action. The students experience in the University should be on the agenda for the next meeting and this issue should also be discussed with the Quality Officers in other Irish Universities.	Board and a committee, chaired by the Head of Student Counselling, and with representation from the SU and the Heads of some of the Support Services has been set up to consider the issues and the way forward.  Action: that the Registrar's Office be requested to re-issue a statement on the policy of appointment of class reps in UCC to all academic staff.
That the university move towards a more integrated structure for student services.  The PRG, while realising the resource implications, recommended 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.	QPC strongly endorsed the recommendation to move towards a more integrated structure for student services.  QPC directed the President to engage a consultant to conduct a review of:  How UCC provides Accommodation to UCC students in the broader context? All accommodation issues to be included with a particular focus on UCC managed accommodation - both currently existing, planned developments and future possibilities. The consultant should report back to the QPC with proposals for the development of a coherent management structure for the Accommodation Office of UCC and the management of UCC-owned student accommodation.  Phase 2 of the work of the consultant will aim to review the reporting relationships, the management and co-ordination of all student support services in UCC with a view to developing an	A consultant was appointed and reported on the student accommodation issues.  The reporting relationships, etc. will be considered as part of the discussions on the possible re-structuring of UCC presently in train.

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	approach for the university towards a more integrated structure.	