

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

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Office of Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

Academic Year 2003/04

28th June, 2004

Members of the Peer Review Group:

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
1.	Professor John Gamble	University College Cork	Chairperson
2.	Mr. Michael Kelleher	University College Cork	Rapporteur
3.	Mr. Feargal Ó Móráin	Enterprise Ireland	Extern
4.	*Dr. Conor O'Carroll	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities	Extern
5.	Mr. Tom Hockaday	Isis Innovation Ltd., University of Oxford	Extern

* Due to illness, Dr. Conor O'Carroll left mid-way through Thursday afternoon, 13 May, 2004, but has participated in the drafting of this report.

Timetable of the site visit

A timetable was developed in consultation between Dr. Norma Ryan, Director, Quality Promotion Unit (QPU), Professor John Gamble, Chairperson of Peer Review Group, Professor Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy and Support and Dr. David Corkery, Chair of the Quality Review Co-ordinating Committee. A list of potential interview candidates was drawn up and Dr Ryan undertook the task of contacting these and drawing up a final plan of interviews.

At the conclusion of the interview period, the Peer Review Panel concluded that the timetable and interviewees were appropriate but with hindsight there were possibly four or five too many interviewees especially on Thursday, 13 May 2004. We **recommend** that a minimum time slot for interviews be 15 minutes.

See Appendix A for the detailed timetable.

Peer Review

- ***Preamble***

No modern, progressive University is without an office for research, or some similar structural arrangement. Such a unit will have overall responsibility for coordination of research planning, policy, strategy, applications and advice, including aspects of commercialisation and associated intellectual property rights. The Office of the Vice President for Research Policy & Support (ORPS) fulfils this role in UCC and it has played a key role attracting major research and infrastructure funding to UCC, most recently the successes associated with the BioSciences Institute and the relocation of the Photonic Systems Group.

The office in UCC was established in 1998/1999, through amalgamation of the Industrial Liaison Office (ILO) and the newly established Office for Research Policy and Support (RSO). The Vice President for Research Policy & Support carries responsibility for management of this centre. This review marks the first independent audit of the centre. As the Peer Review Group (PRG) our aims are to confirm and comment on the self-assessment report and to provide a comprehensive review of the present state of the unit. Based upon the information provided, and with the benefit of interviews during the site visit, our report will contain recommendations intended to improve overall the performance of the unit.

- ***Methodology***

Professor John Gamble, together with Dr. N. Ryan (QPU) and in consultation with the Vice President for Research Policy & Support and the Chair of the Quality Review Co-ordinating Committee drafted details of the site visit and interviews. Professor Gamble had responsibility for chairing interview sessions and maintaining the timetable. Mr. Michael Kelleher had responsibility of rapporteur and in this regard arranged to have secretarial assistance for the panel. The external assessors had responsibility for the primary questioning of the interviewees during the interview sessions.

In addition, the panel met with Cork City, Industry and other Tertiary representatives in a round-table discussion on the second evening of the assessment process. This meeting took place in the Staff Common Room of UCC.

The minutes were documented most efficiently by Ms. Bridie Hartnett, (Administrative Officer, Office of the Secretary and Bursar) who also assisted with the formatting of the draft documents.

- ***Site Visit***

The panel came to UCC between 12th – 14th May 2004. Part of the site visit included a tour through the BioSciences Institute, and including the Food Science and Technology Building and the new BioInnovation Centre. During this excursion, new developments and sites, such as the Pharmacy School, the Medical Science Building and the Postgraduate Research Library were outlined. The premises occupied by the Office for Research Policy and Support and the Industrial Liaison Office, including the Office of the Vice President for Research Policy & Support were also visited. Due to pressing University business in Dublin, the Vice President for Research Policy & Support was unable to attend events on Thursday and Friday. On Friday morning, (14 May, 2004, 08.45), the Peer Review Panel participated in a telephone conference call with the Vice President for Research Policy & Support during which he was briefed on the principal findings of the review process. These findings were the basis of the briefing given to all staff of ORPS at the conclusion of the site visit.

- ***How was the Peer Review Group Report put together?***

All panel members contributed to the drafting of the report, with individual members assuming responsibility for certain parts of the report. A draft report was prepared following the site visit, a draft version being circulated to all members of the panel for revision prior to the finalisation.

Overall Analysis

- *Self-Assessment Report*

The panel was impressed by the Self-Assessment Report and congratulated the ORPS team for the quality, depth and frankness of the information provided.

- *Comment on the overall analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, SWOT) of the department both as addressed in the Self-Assessment Report and from the perspective of the Peer Review Group*

The panel agreed that the SWOT analysis provided by RSO and ILO was accurate, honest, forthright and refreshingly open. A number of the issues raised in the SWOT analysis were amplified as a result of the interview sessions carried out in the interview of staff. These will form a substantive portion of the recommendations below.

- *Comment on the benchmarking exercise carried out by the Department*

The panel concluded that the choice of comparisons in the UK universities were not directly comparable with UCC. In the case of the benchmarking undertaken by the Research Policy & Support Office, the panel noted that the name of the UK comparator was not identified, but we understand the need to uphold a request for confidentiality in this regard. Nevertheless, it would have been preferable if the selected institution had been available for cross-referencing by the panel. In relation to the benchmarking exercise of the ILO, the UK examples quoted were not considered appropriate for reasons of scale of operations in these institutions relative to UCC. Comparison with Trinity College Dublin was considered entirely appropriate for the purposes of the assessment.

Findings of the Peer Review Group

- *Governance*

ORPS has two responsibilities that are historical and were brought together when the office was formed in 1998/99. These are the Office for Research Policy & Support and the Industrial Liaison Office. They continue to function as essentially independent units, although the panel **recommends** that a closer alignment take place.

Following from the interview sessions the panel noted a widespread perception throughout the University that a “conflict of interest” situation may arise in the Office for Research Policy & Support. The phrase “conflict of interest” is not intended to relate in any way to personal benefit (in connection with which the University has a stated policy) but rather the perception that the personal research interests and professional background of most of the individuals working in ORPS may have an undue influence on the determination of research policy. It was made clear to the panel that this is a perception which has existed since the establishment of ORPS in 1998/99. The fact that, currently, three of the staff of the Research Support Office all come from the same academic discipline has added to the perception.

The panel is not in a position to pass judgement on this perception. However, it is strongly of the view that every effort should be made to provide that the formulation of research policy is carried out in an open and transparent manner and that the policy is clearly promulgated and understood throughout the University. It is also critically important for the confidence of the academic staff that there is a clear decision making process when selecting consortia for major funding competitions.

In this connection, the panel was surprised to note that the Research Committee of the Academic Council did not see itself as having any significant role in the formulation of research policy. The creation, more recently, of the President’s *ad hoc* Committee on Research does not seem to have clarified the situation.

The panel **recommends** that the process by which research policy and strategy are formulated should be reviewed immediately with the objective of ensuring widespread involvement in the process and commitment to the outcome.

- ***Services, Structure & Functions***

The panel sees an opportunity for the Office to rise to meet the challenges created by UCC’s impressive increase in research activity. Improving performance often involves identifying things to stop doing as much as what more to do!

The panel sees the activities of the Office of Vice-President for Research Policy & Support in three parts, and **recommends** that the Office be organised in three sections:

- (a) Vice President's Office (VPO)
- (b) Research Support Office (RSO)
- (c) Technology Transfer Office (TTO)

with the RSO and TTO reporting in to the VPO.

These sections need not be physically co-located, although the greater the physical distance, the more effort is required to maintain the social cohesion. Wherever the location, the RSO and TTO require a level of accommodation appropriate for meeting external business visitors and also conducting staff meetings.

(a) VPO

The VPO directs *research* strategy and policy formulation within UCC. The Office of the VPO should contain the Vice President of Research and appropriate administrative support staff that could be independent of the other two sections or shared. The Vice President co-ordinates the activities of all three sections, and would rely upon effective heads of RSO and TTO to manage all the day-to-day functions of their offices. The Vice President of Research, the head of RSO and head of TTO would form the senior management team, supported by the Vice President's administrator, providing leadership and prioritisation of tasks; these three individuals would need to work together effectively and constructively.

The panel **recommends** an early review of the processes for formal decision making relating to research management decisions which have an impact on strategy and policy. This review to be managed by the VPO, together with the University's Executive Management Group, Research Committee, *Ad Hoc* Research Committee, Inter Faculty Graduate Studies Board, and Deans - EMG.

The panel **recommends** publication of information that clearly explains the services of each of the three sections of the Office for the benefit of researchers and business inside and outside UCC. This will involve describing the processes involved in interacting with the Office.

(b) RSO

The RSO could comprise a Research Support Officer, a Research Funding Officer and an administrative assistant. Responsibilities to include the core functions of:

- 1) identification and dissemination of research funding opportunities
- 2) pre-award administration of research grant and contract applications, including advice to grant applicants, effective liaison with the Office of Research Grants and Contracts with Finance.
- 3) negotiation of research grant and contracts terms and conditions
- 4) intellectual property ownership due diligence.

There is strong demand for an individual to concentrate on encouraging and supporting UCC researchers bidding for EU research funding. The current Projects Officer role is currently divided between the current Research Support and current Industrial Liaison Office functions. The panel **recommends** this post be positioned in the RSO, fulfilling a role designed to help researchers bid successfully for research funding, concentrating on EU Framework sources.

The panel **recommends** all requests for additional resource be presented in the form of a business plan, presenting the University with an 'investment opportunity' upon which a decision could then be taken. The plan would need to specify very clearly the projected benefits and returns (which are not all financial) to UCC from the investment.

During the interview process staff of ORPS identified 'Promotion of Entrepreneurship' as an important activity for UCC. Whilst this activity could be undertaken within the existing Research Support structure, the existing resource limitations indicate this may be an activity the RSO should not continue with unless more dedicated resource can be provided. The culture of entrepreneurship within

UCC will develop organically anyway, aided by the activities of RSO and TTO. However, development will be slower without a dedicated resource.

(c) TTO

The panel **recommends** that the current *Industrial Liaison Office (ILO)* be renamed the “Technology Transfer Office” (TTO) to bring it in line with current practice throughout Europe and the USA.

The panel observed that in UCC technology transfer expertise and resource is currently spread across a number of areas of the University:

- the Industrial Liaison Office with formal responsibility but little direct resource
- the two staff of the Technology Transfer Initiative
- the [~3] staff in the BioTransfer Unit
- the [1-2] staff fulfilling technology transfer activities in the NMRC.
- the possibility of the new Photonics group developing its own TT resource was also noted.

The panel **recommends** that this resource be connected and co-ordinated. Whilst there may be a case for additional people resource, this is difficult to judge before the existing diffused resource is viewed as a whole. There is a clear need for the TTO to have access to a patent budget to enable the planned investment and development of the University’s patent portfolio.

In order to drive the overall coordination and direction of the resources applied to technology transfer within the University (including the resources funded by Enterprise Ireland and Enterprise Ireland staff on campus), the panel recommends the creation of a new full time senior post of Technology Transfer Manager reporting to the Vice President for Research Policy & Support. The post holder should have a strong background in commercialisation of research. Appropriate and transparent decision making processes should be put in place to enable the Technology Transfer Manager to run the office on a day-to-day basis within University policy and procedures.

Current plans envisage continuing with a model in which TT resource is dispersed across research activities until a number of research areas have established sufficient activity to centralise the University's TT resource in a central office. The common sense of this approach in the short term should be balanced against the risks of: (a) developing varied practice across the University (with associated varied commercial risk exposure); (b) distracting local senior researchers who are drawn into management issues and away from their core business of research; and (c) complexities that may arise in the event of later re-integration.

- ***Staffing***

The panel was made aware, in a number of interviews, that there existed an unresolved communication issue within the staff of ORPS. The fact that there are currently no regular staff meetings, involving both sections of the ORPS, is not helping to resolve the situation and the panel viewed this very seriously.

The specific **recommendations** which the panel has made above are intended to remedy this undesirable situation.

A number of interviewees and several panel members raised the issue of the duties of the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support being part-time, different views emerging as to the desirability of the present arrangement. On balance, the panel believes that a retention of academic, particularly research, activity on the part of the Vice-President is desirable as it facilitates interaction between the holder of the Office and the academic community through a maintenance of credibility (but see comment above regarding "conflict of interest"). The panel, however, recommends that the balance of Vice-President's duties and academic duties be reviewed, reflective of the view that it may not be necessary for the academic/research content of the post to be as much as 50%.

- ***Accommodation***

The ILO (TTO) and RSO presently occupy discrete accommodation on Campus. ILO (TTO) is accommodated in housing on Western Road and the RSO on the main quadrangle. The panel are aware that the RSO space is under threat for an alternative

use and we are also aware of subsidence-related renovations being undertaken on buildings on the Western Road site. We signal to University Management that this may pose an opportunity to consider integration of the RSO and ILO (TTO) to a single and preferably central location. This issue should be directed to the Executive Management Group and to the Office of the Vice President for Planning, Communications and Development for urgent consideration.

- ***Financing***

The provision of budget for the Office of the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support seems to stand up quite well against the Irish benchmark quoted in the documentation provided. The staff structure proposals which the panel is making above may lead to a demand for additional resources, particularly in the area of technology transfer. However, it is the panel's view that any such proposal for additional resources must include a business plan, with both financial and other data, to support the case. The availability of resources for this function will, the panel envisages, depend to some extent on the ability of the University to recover its overheads on research activity and it notes that it is University policy to enhance this recovery, thus providing funds for the essential supports for the continuing expansion of the University's research programme.

Recommendations for Improvement

In opening this final section the PRG panel wish to congratulate the Research Office and the Industrial Liaison Office for the documentation provided to the panel. The general feeling of those interviewed is that the Office for Research Policy and Support is an essential feature of the research culture at UCC and enjoys excellent relations with other administrative facilities, such as the Finance Office. The Office is also to be congratulated for keeping the University community well informed about research opportunities in the Irish and European arena. It has played key roles in the success of UCC in gaining major research funding from SFI, EU and PRTLTI sources, most recently in the areas of Biomedical and Materials Science Research. Major findings and recommendations of the Peer Review Panel are listed below. They are not in any order of priority, but we wish to underscore an urgent need for formal restructuring the process of management (highlighted in many of the sections above) so that the

best needs of the ORPS, the University and it's interaction with the wider community can be better fulfilled.

- The panel believes that the request for more resources needs to be accompanied by clear plans and objectives identifying what the new resources will deliver to the benefit of the University. In asking for more resources the office needs to develop a clear business plan setting out these returns which are of course not only financial. This requires the members of the office to meet new challenges.
- The future role of the VP for Research should be that of a leadership role in developing research policies and strategies for all the areas of the University. The administrative and professional roles should be delegated to appropriate senior staff reporting to the Vice-President for Research.
- The panel have commented on a need to restructure and consolidate the commercialisation aspect of research activities in the University.
- To avoid issues of the appearance of conflict of interest there is a need for transparency and formality in University wide decision-making.
- The panel recommends better communication to ensure that the processes by which University-wide decisions related to research policy are made are more open and accountable. This will require the ORPS to seek advice, possibly from HR, and to activate processes in which lead to change in this area
- In relation to the structure of the ILO and RSO the panel sees a need for closer liaison between the two - the panel recognises the parallelism of the RSO and ILO – there needs to be more and more effective inter-communication.
- Through the proceedings the panel became aware of the need to address issues of management in the entire ORPS – this involves communication, planning and prioritisation of activities.

- The location of office space should be reviewed.
- Senior managers should review the roles and interactions between various academic committees, particularly those associated with the wider research activities of the University. It is vital that an open and effective conduit of communication be maintained between ORPS, Research Committees and Senior Management at UCC.

Appendix A

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Office of the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support Industrial Liaison Office

Wednesday 12th May 2004

Time Activity

14.30 **Briefing Meeting**

To discuss division of tasks; discussion of terms of reference of review; to discuss self-assessment. Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days. Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified.

- Peer Review Group
- Dr. Norma Ryan, Director of Quality Promotion Unit.

Venue: Tower Room 2, North Wing

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

Meeting with Heads of Offices

16.00 Professor Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

16.30 Dr. Ruth Davis, Head, Research Office

16.45 Mr Tony Weaver, Head, Industrial Liaison Office

Meetings with individual members of staff

17.00 Ms Miriam Collins

17.10 Mr. Kieran Counihan

17.20 Ms. Marie Healy

Ms. Dolores Keane

17.35 Ms. Alison Naylor

17.45 Dr. David Corkery

18.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to review the proceedings of the afternoon and to finalise arrangements for the following day.

20.00 Dinner for members of review team and members of Unit

Thursday 13th May 2004

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group

- PRG
- Dr. Norma Ryan, *Director of Quality Promotion*

Venue: Tower Room 1, North Wing

Meetings with representatives of users of the services provided by the unit

- 09.00 Professor Gerald Fitzgerald, Head, Department of Microbiology
- 09.20 Professor Anita Maguire, Department of Chemistry & Director of ABCRF
- 09.40 Dr. Marcus Keane, Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, PI
- 10.00 Ms. Mary McSweeney, Finance Officer, UCC + representative of Research section of Finance Office
- 10.20 Professor Tommie McCarthy, Head, Department of Biochemistry
- 10.40 Mr. Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- 11.10 Mr. Eamonn Sweeney, Advisor to the President
- 11.30 Professor Michael Murphy, Dean, Faculty of Medicine & Health
- 11.45 Dr. Tom Moore, Department of Biochemistry, PI
- 12.30 Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Department of French
- 12.45 Professor Pat Fitzpatrick, Chair, Academic Council Committee for Research

- 13.00 **Lunch**
Reflect on impressions of first meetings and complete information as necessary.

- PRG

- 14.00 **Tour of facilities**
Visit to BioSciences Institute, facilities at Brighton Villas (Industrial Liaison Office) and North Wing (Research Support Office).

- PRG
- Dr. David Corkery

Meetings with Officers of the University

Discuss views and perceptions of the Officers of the University in relation to the Office of the Vice-President for Research Policy and Support

- 15.00 Professor Gerard Wrixon, President
- 15.45 Professor Aidan Moran, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
- 16.00 Mr. Michael O'Sullivan, Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development
- 16.15 Mr. John Fitzgerald, Librarian
- 16.30 Mr. Mark Poland, Director of Buildings & Estates
- 16.45 Professor David Cox, Dean, Faculty of Arts
- 17.15 **Meetings with external stakeholders**

Venue: Staff Common Room

Dr. David Cotter, Head, Photonic Systems Group, UCC
Dr Michael Delaney, Head of Development, Cork Institute of Technology
Mr Robin O'Sullivan, President, Cork Chamber of Commerce
Mr William Opperman, Director of Engineering, Raidtec Corporation Ltd.

19.00 **Debriefing Meeting**

Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day and including a working dinner where the findings of the team are discussed and recommendations for improvement are considered.

- PRG
- Dr. Norma Ryan, *Director of Quality Promotion*

Friday 14th May 2004

08.30 **Convening of Peer Review Group**

Discussion of any issues that need to be clarified/explored with the Head

- PRG
- Dr. Norma Ryan, Director of Quality Promotion

Venue: Tower Room 1

08.45 **Concluding session**

Discussion with Head of Office in a private meeting any issues that have arisen during the visit; final clarification of any issues; indication by PRG of findings of team.

- PRG
- Professor Kevin Collins *via conference telephone call*

09.15 **Preparation of first draft of final report**

PRG prepares the exit presentation and discussion of findings and recommendations.

11.30 **Exit presentation**

To be made to all staff of the Unit by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. The exit presentation is not for discussion at this time.

Venue: Tower Room 1

12.00 **Lunch**

Finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

- PRG
- Dr. Norma Ryan, *Director of Quality Promotion*

14.00 **Departure of externs**