



**UCC**

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire  
University College Cork, Ireland

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, CORK**

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT/QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

**OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT FOR TEACHING & LEARNING  
*INCLUDING*  
IONAD BAIRRE: TEACHING & LEARNING CENTRE, UCC**

**2011/2012**

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

## PEER REVIEW GROUP MEMBERS

Name	Position/Discipline	Institution
Professor Alan Davidson (CHAIR)	Dean for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment	Robert Gordon University, Scotland
Mr Ben Honan	President, Students' Union	University College Cork
Professor Åsa Kettis	Head of Unit for Quality and Evaluation	Uppsala University, Sweden
Professor Bairbre Redmond	Dean of Undergraduate Studies & Deputy Registrar, Teaching & Learning	University College Dublin
Professor Helen Whelton	Dean of Graduate School, College of Medicine and Health	University College Cork
<i>Professor Luan Ahma (observer)</i>	<i>Vice-Rector</i>	<i>University of Pristina, Kosovo</i>

## TIMETABLE OF THE SITE VISIT

The Timetable is attached as Appendix A.

The timetable was suitable and adequate for the purposes of the site visit. There were many different meetings scheduled with staff, students and officers of the University as well as with some representatives of external stakeholders. The schedule was intense given the range of people to be interviewed (n=56) and the group at times felt that it may have been preferable to interview fewer people. However the members of the Peer Review Group (PRG) felt they received a comprehensive overview of the Activities of the Office of the VP Teaching & Learning and Ionad Bairre in a short time.

The PRG found all participants to be well-prepared for meetings, and without exception, were very positive and enthusiastic about the university. Those who had direct experience of engaging with Ionad Bairre were extremely positive about the commitment of the Ionad Bairre team, and the effectiveness of the activities and support provided.

## **PEER REVIEW**

### **Methodology**

The Group appointed Professor Alan Davidson as the Chair of the Peer Review Group. The Group acted as a single group throughout the site visit and agreed all the findings and recommendations.

### **Site Visit**

The site visit took place on the second day of the process guided by the staff of Ionad Bairre. The VP for T&L was unable to guide the visit due to illness. During the site visit the PRG were given a tour of the main accommodation used by the staff and also some of the teaching facilities of UCC as examples of the standard applied throughout. The tour included the small office in the Boole Library, the offices assigned to the VP, the Council Room, Ionad Bairre's office accommodation and the Windle Building.

### **Peer Review Group Report**

All members took shared responsibility for questions and topics and for drafting sections of the report. An initial draft of the report was prepared during the afternoon and evening of the second full day of the site visit. The report was finalised subsequent to the site visit using email communications and submitted to the Quality Promotion Unit. All members of the PRG agreed the report.

## **OVERALL ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The panel was invited by The Quality Promotion Committee in UCC to review The Office of the Vice President for Teaching and Learning (OVPTL) which was established in 2008 and Ionad Bairre, the teaching and learning centre of the University. All documentation was sent to the reviewers and reviewed in advance of the visit to UCC. The panel convened between 26-28th March.

### **Self-Assessment Report (SAR)**

The Ionad Bairre team and that of the VP for T&L are to be congratulated on the extensive descriptions, analysis, consultation, feedback and reflection undertaken and documented. The appendices to the self-assessment report were well organised and clearly presented and provide an in-depth and accurate account of Ionad Bairre which greatly facilitated our understanding of the structure and organisation of the centre, the context within which it operates, its functioning, the perceptions of the wider university as well as its graduates and students and its accomplishments, future ambitions and challenges.

The OVPTL oversees three distinct units:

***Ionad Bairre, The Teaching and Learning Centre***: an Academic Centre focusing on Staff Development and scholarly approaches to Teaching and Learning.

***Centre for Adult Continuing Education (CACE)***: An Administrative Centre providing a wide range of courses to meet the needs of Adult Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

***The National Academy for Integration of Research Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL)***: A national teaching and learning initiative led by University College Cork. The Academy is funded from national funding and includes all higher education institutions in Ireland.

This quality review included the OVPTL and Ionad Bairre only. Owing to the small number of staff involved and the closely linked functions, they were taken together for the purposes of this review. Both CACE and NAIRTL have been and will be the subject of separate reviewing processes.

The PRG felt that the OVPTL and Ionad Bairre although closely linked are two separate entities and that although the OVPTL has oversight of Ionad Bairre (and CACE and NAIRTL) the office has its own separate and distinct functions. Overall there was an imbalance in the self assessment process in the level of detail provided on Ionad Bairre and the separate functions of the OVPTL. Whilst the vision, mission, history, location, reporting relationships and structure of the OVPTL was well described, there was room for further elaboration on the distinct senior leadership role of the VP within the university apart from overseeing the

three centres. The PRG considered that this lack of a critical and strategic analysis of the OVPTL as a separate entity to Ionad Bairre was a missed opportunity, particularly in regard to the positioning and future development of the OVPTL role within the University structure.

The university-level strategic plan which was included with the documentation expires this year and reference was made to consultation and involvement in the future strategy. The self assessment provided a clear description of achievements towards delivering the strategy over the last three years, there was less focus on those parts that had not been delivered.

The Self-Assessment Report sets out the vision and mission of the 2009-12 Teaching and Learning strategy. These statements are very high level and the vision is commendable. However the PRG felt that the mission was aspirational. Although the guidelines for SAR from the Quality Promotion Unit suggest analysis<sup>1</sup> on the achievements of the aims and objectives of the centre there is no reference to aims, objectives or specific goals in the SAR itself either for the OVPTL or for Ionad Bairre. The introduction states that the review focuses on achievement of key goals in the strategy and analyses the work done which informed their recommendations for improved structures and processes, as well as the planning of future work. However, the narrative describes the functioning of the two units against the general backdrop of the vision and mission statement but is lacking in specifics which makes it difficult to evaluate progress in delivering each goal set out in the strategy. The PRG would have welcomed an explicit analysis of the progress made in delivering the specific (tangible) objectives associated with the relevant 38 KPIs or 11 targeted actions outlined in the strategy document developed by OVPTL and Ionad Bairre in 2008. There appears to have been little monitoring of the strategy.

The PRG considered that the drafting of a new strategy would provide an opportunity to address many of the issues arising within this review. The PRG commended the Office of the VP Teaching & Learning for ensuring involvement of staff and students at all levels in the development process of the last Strategic Plan. However, subsequent implementation and follow up by all relevant units could have been monitored and reported in the SAR. The PRG would have benefited from such an update. The PRG strongly recommends that the same wide involvement will characterise the development of the upcoming strategic plan since it increases joint ownership of the strategies, which facilitates subsequent implementation and

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<sup>1</sup> How do the Mission Statement of the department and the Aims & Objectives relate to its aspirations with respect to quality? How does the department know it is meeting these Aims and Objectives?

follow-up. The new strategy needs to be embraced and supported by the leadership of the organisation and underpinned by a more tangible evaluative approach than the current strategy, with KPIs expressed in the form of measurable structure, process and outcome variables. These should be both qualitative and quantitative indicators, including student-centred ones. The new strategy should be the subject of ongoing monitoring and review.

### **SWOT Analysis**

Appendix J of the Self-Assessment Report provided a detailed description of the SWOT analysis. This full report provides interesting insights into the perceived opportunities and threats in the external environment and the strengths and weaknesses in the internal context.

Although the SWOT was very well conducted the PRG felt that the group did not sufficiently consider opportunities to be significantly different or to play a higher game in terms of strategic impact. The staff's away day for carrying out the SWOT offered the chance for some blue skies thinking that the PRG believes was not fully drawn on. The staff might have acknowledged and celebrated the success of the bottom up growth of Ionad Bairre; reflected on how to prioritise their goals; focused their efforts and plan for future development of the support of teaching and learning in UCC which could be a consolidation of the current arrangements or an ambitious evolution into a dramatically bigger well-resourced centre for teaching and learning with peripheral nodes in each of the colleges and networked with all relevant staff at school level.

The PRG saw the volunteers that Ionad Bairre have nurtured as a real strength which could give even more benefits to the university if there were some way of allowing key players to empower them within their own workplace settings.

The 6 day week workload of the staff is not sustainable and should be considered a weakness to be addressed.

The lack of succession planning is a threat. The co-directors are close enough to retirement but they do not currently have space and time to mentor. There is an urgent need to define the focus and establishment of the unit for the future, and to plan for succession and knowledge transfer from the current co-directors.

## **Benchmarking**

The centre was benchmarked against two centres in NUIG and in the University of Reading with similar remits regarding generic learning and teaching development, but wider remits in other aspects, including e-learning. This was a useful exercise as it provided details of different ways of achieving the goals of Ionad Bairre. However by merging the review of OVPTL with Ionad Bairre there was a lost opportunity to benchmark OVPTL against similar offices in these two institutions.

## **FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP**

### **Governance**

The PRG identified a clear need for high-level leadership in the support of and development of high quality teaching and learning in UCC.

### **Services**

The Office of the VP for T&L provides support for T&L development through Ionad Bairre and for adult learners through CACE.

The PRG noted the range of services provided by Ionad Bairre, including delivery of programmes for staff leading to accredited qualifications, including the Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Diploma in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the Masters Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The PRG was of the very strong opinion that there is a need for another staff member to help deliver these programmes and other support activities.

The PRG noted that Ionad Bairre's activities have built on self-selecting participants in courses and seminars. These individuals have been offered high quality programmes and engaging seminars where international guests have contributed new perspectives on T & L and staff has been able to share good practice across the university.

Ionad Bairre has built its activities on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) approach. This approach embraces T&L in a reflective and evidence based manner. Its strength is that it provides generic skills that enable teachers to tackle new situations in a reflective and systematic way.

The SoTL-approach spans over a continuum. At one end it refers to the common run of teachers' ability to reflect on their own teaching in the light of available evidence and continuously fine tune their practice accordingly. At the other end of the continuum, a full-fledged research approach to T&L is to be found. The UCC staff that have received Diploma and/or Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education are to be found somewhere between these ends.

The PRG believes that although it is a undisputable asset that the Ionad Bairre staff themselves are to be found at the research end of the continuum, which they clearly are, the priority of UCC should be to invest resources in assuring that the vast majority of the staff have the skills and confidence to teach in an informed way that maximises learning for today's students and for the students of the future (see comments on diversity and internationalisation below) The PRG believes that the main efforts of Ionad Bairre should be on enabling the many to reflect on, and enhance their teaching in a scholarly, evidence based manner, making effective use of technologies and engaging with student evaluations and feedback. The aim should be that all teachers that the students meet during their time at UCC have this ability. Teachers who are trained systematically, approach their teaching in a way that is conducive to better student learning. Better learning improves retention rates, learning outcomes and ultimately the quality of graduates, their satisfaction with their education and employers' satisfaction with the graduates. This is eventually reflected in institutional reputation (which is part of rankings).

In order to ensure a basic level of pedagogic skills in as high a proportion of teachers as possible, supporting and encouraging staff to qualify for the Certificate should be prioritised. Those who wish to complete the Diploma and Masters programmes could be facilitated to take modules available in other institutions. Indeed, it should be a priority for the new proposed National Academy for Teaching and Learning in Ireland to develop a coherent national web of high-quality modules in different aspects of T&L for academic staff (maximising national plans for the development of regional clusters), where possible using on-line and blended learning.

The PRG believes that national collaboration may be sought to ensure cost-effective provision of higher level accreditation and themed courses building on the expertise of



different universities within Ireland. Such national coordination would allow for fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences across the sector. This does however have to be balanced by a fair amount of local provision, adding the element of cross-fertilisation and networking between teachers within UCC.

Through its work to-date, Ionad Bairre has up-skilled a community of staff throughout the organisation. In addition there is a good network of volunteers contributing to the teaching in programmes offered by Ionad Bairre. The PRG recognised the potential to build on the knowledge and skills of these ambassadors, and to empower them to contribute to development at the local level. The PRG believes that these volunteers should be encouraged and rewarded in some way – this would be one way of demonstrating the importance and value attached to teaching, and continuous improvement.

Ionad Bairre needs a clearer role at UCC. It should be a unit supporting the Vice President of T&L as well as academic leaders and staff throughout the University. The staff of Ionad Bairre should continue with their scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) approach to the enhancement of T&L, but put more weight on meeting current high-level, institutional needs, as well as reaching beyond the current enthusiasts. The following key issues require continued/strengthened support by the expertise at Ionad Bairre:

- *Enhancing the student learning experience*, informed by systematic evaluation of: student achievement and feedback; effective practice at UCC, drawing on staff reflection and student feedback; national and international references and examples.
- *Supporting the development of e-learning and blended learning*. During the interviews with UCC staff, e-learning/blended learning emerged as an area where the need for clarification of the UCC strategy, roles and resourcing seems most pressing. Ionad Bairre's expertise in T&L should be used to ensure that the further development of e-learning/blended learning at UCC is informed by available evidence of the conditions and practices that are known to be associated with effective e-learning/blended learning.
- *Learning in the international classroom*. The training in cultural awareness for teaching and learning was noted by the PRG. The PRG did however note an opportunity to further recognise and take advantage of the increasing cultural diversity of the student population. Mixing local and international students with a

goal of giving all students experience of internationalisation is a win / win situation for all students as they prepare to work in a global economy. Ionad Bairre should support teachers in developing skills to overcome the challenges presented by increasing student diversity, and actively capitalise on this diversity to increase student learning. Responding to this opportunity would involve working closely with the International Student Office. It was not clear to the PRG whether the OVPTL had any engagement with the International Student Office.

Other issues, to which the expertise of Ionad Bairre is central, include:

- Specific pedagogical considerations in adult learning;
- Leadership in T&L – supporting local pedagogical leaders and building up the expertise in T&L in high level management;
- The development of student participation in learning, including peer learning;
- Further development of assessments;
- Strengthened intentionality of placements.

Ionad Bairre should be recognised as the "hub" for supporting and sharing evidence-based enhancement of T&L and fostering a scholarly approach to T&L among UCC leaders and staff. The ultimate goal should be to contribute to ensuring all students have a top quality learning experience in UCC. The staff of Ionad Bairre should focus on research that is immediately aligned to its responsibilities in providing support for T&L, and they should maintain its international outlook to the extent it contributes to the quality of their support activities.

As suggested in the SAR, the programmes and seminars could be complemented by themed workshops at the local school level – as a means of implementing the university wide T&L strategy while adjusting to the needs and priorities in the local context.

### **Staffing**

Ionad Bairre has a staffing complement of four, two full-time staff and two part-time staff. All of the staff are either on short term contracts or are part-time. The PRG was concerned at the absence of security of tenure, recognising that this makes for a very unstable and stressful work environment. The PRG was of the view that there is a need for a core of permanent staff to ensure continuity and availability of expertise.

The PRG noted that in addition to the staff referred to above there also exists a good network of volunteers who are of great assistance in delivering the activities of Ionad Bairre. There is a real need to recognise, keep and encourage these staff.

The recently-appointed Teaching Fellows associated with Ionad Bairre need to be more strategic in their aims and to move away from the notion of traditional “research-led” concepts of academic outputs as the gold standard. Practice needs to change internally but be captured for internal and external purposes. It needs to be recognised that such work may not increase the ranking of the University in international league tables but is essential to the institution in providing the best possible learning experience for students. Additional benefits are likely through increased student progression and retention rates, with positive impacts on KPIs.

#### **Accommodation**

During the site visit the PRG toured the facilities available on the campus for the activities of the VP and Ionad Bairre. The tour started at the Boole Library where the PRG noted the small internal office that used to serve as the only office space of Ionad Bairre, and that is now used by Ionad Bairre students in carrying out their projects. Although the adjacent seminar room is ideal for T&L seminars there appeared to be occasional difficulty in booking the facility. A more formal sharing agreement might facilitate the accommodation of both user groups. Both the Library and Ionad Bairre share many aspirations in regard to enhancement and support of the T&L agenda in UCC. Therefore the physical presence of Ionad Bairre in the Library is a powerful signal regarding this shared vision for excellence in teaching and learning and it should be encouraged and supported.

Next the PRG visited the office of the Senior Executive Assistant to the VP located on the Main Quadrangle. The office is shared with another member of staff and the team noted the unsatisfactory proximity of the photocopier to the Senior Executive Assistant’s desk. The office of the VP was the next destination. Although this office was of an adequate size and in a suitably prestigious location the PRG was of the opinion that it would facilitate team working if the office of the Senior Executive Assistant was more adjacent to it.

The PRG then viewed the University's Council Room in the Quadrangle where teaching and learning courses and seminars are usually held at lunchtime. This is very prestigious accommodation with very good facilities for teaching and learning, although it has limitations with regard to use of technology. The room reflects the esteem in which the University holds the work of the Ionad Bairre team. The availability of an ante room to the Council Room accommodates the provision of light lunches for staff taking seminars and courses during their lunch break, thus providing useful opportunities for socialising and networking among the academic staff who come from diverse disciplines across the University.

Ionad Bairre's main office space is located in the West Lodge of the central campus. The accommodation provides for offices for four staff including the two co-directors. Space for meetings appears cramped and there is no nearby seminar room. Given the purpose of the accommodation as a hub for teaching and learning, the PRG felt that this is unfortunate. For health and safety reasons it is also proposed to section off some of the downstairs space to eliminate access to the steep staircase, which has been judged to be a safety risk. This will reduce the available space by one office and will decrease the available storage and photocopying space.

Lastly the PRG visited the Windle Building. Previously home to the departments of Anatomy and Physiology, the building is set to become the new hub for student support services when funding becomes available in 18 months' time. The PRG were informed that it is proposed to accommodate the Ionad Bairre team in the new Student Hub, when built, and in the interim the team would like to move into some of this space. They have been advised by the Office of Buildings and Estates that the cost of adapting the accommodation will be of the order of €20,000 which is outside of their available budget.

In summary, the PRG considered that the current accommodation available to the VP T&L and support staff is not ideal and would be enhanced by better juxta-positioning of offices and dealing with the photocopier issue. Accommodation for the Ionad Bairre team is less than ideal and consolidation of facilities in the Windle building with the co-location of a technology rich teaching space would address these problems. Future consideration could also be given to providing space in a location adjacent to Ionad Bairre for the soon to be appointed director of e-learning and the Learning Technologies Unit. Housing these entities

in the same space would increase the likelihood of shared goals, teamwork and cooperation amongst the staff.

### **Financing**

The available non-pay core university budget for the Office of the VP T&L of €8,000 per annum severely limits the scope of actions by the VP and the situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. A new strategy for Teaching & Learning will have resource implications, and the budget to deliver on the new strategy needs to be developed in conjunction with the Finance Office. Where possible, existing University resources should be used and synergies should be leveraged, potential for income generation should be explored and the University should explore means of providing the amounts outstanding that are necessary to deliver the Teaching & Learning strategy. Support for central Teaching & Learning development is the responsibility of the Colleges as well as the centre and this should be reflected in the communications and support architecture.

### **Communications**

The strategic prioritisation of the teaching and learning function creates a need to embed and develop IB beyond its current existence. The PRG felt that the staff of Ionad Bairre have done outstanding work in providing a central support for the promotion of the scholarship of Teaching & Learning in the absence of other teaching and learning supports in UCC.

IB has been very successful in promoting voluntary engagement by staff: firstly, by staff volunteering to participate as learners in IB's courses and events; and, secondly, by staff volunteering to share their expertise and experience as contributors to IB activities. This is a very positive indicator of a culture and commitment to quality by both IB and the staff who volunteer. Further development and committed resources are needed to allow IB to reach beyond enthusiastic volunteer participants, to target a wider staff group and support strategic development and enhancement needs. The unit's recognised skills with motivated staff and their considerable institutional reputation in T&L make it well-placed to play a lead role in identifying and supporting strategic teaching and learning projects across the university.

The recent development within UCC of the implementation of standardised student feedback at the modular level, provides great scope for supporting and enhancing T&L. First, strongly performing individuals and units can be identified and celebrated, their approaches can be shared more widely, and “stars” could be supported to contribute to wider enhancement activity e.g. as recognised topic experts. These successful units could be used to leverage wider cross-institution development. Second, data from student feedback can identify specific needs for development – both module staff and specific aspects. To facilitate such a targeted approach it will be necessary for the Office of the VP for T&L to be an active participant in the module feedback measurement as part of a quality assessment, quality improvement process. Ionad Bairre needs to collaborate with Heads of School, student representatives and other stakeholders in order to identify and target poorly performing individuals. Thus Ionad Bairre would extend its reach to the entire University academic community. The targeted approach should be integrated with the demand-led development support.

The reach of the VP should be extended by building a communicative structure through colleges to open up a conduit for T&L within colleges. The VP T&L needs to strengthen nodes or satellites in colleges and schools. Most of the elements of this network are in existence but formal networks, structures and clear lines of communication are needed to build on the success already achieved by Ionad Bairre. By connecting these nodes and empowering them to develop their own teaching and learning agendas whilst contributing to the centre, the university would tap into its own resources and would be enabled to be proactive rather than reactive with regard to the focus on institutional strategic priorities.

### **Conclusions**

The strategic prioritisation of the teaching and learning function in UCC creates a need to embed and develop Ionad Bairre beyond its current tenuous existence. The PRG suggests that Ionad Bairre makes a transition from focussing primarily on voluntary participation (see comments on page 13) to target strategic development and enhancement needs. This should include needs identified in student evaluations, and the targeting of staff who have real needs, but who may not volunteer.

Rationalisation of the credited training offerings: If resources are limited, support should be provided for development to Diploma level only and the leadership of the unit should be

used to coordinate efforts to improve Teaching & Learning structures. For example the current cohort of teaching fellows could develop an initiative to improve the approach to assessment on a University wide basis. Such an initiative might look at the variation in approach to assessment, appropriateness of assessment, mapping assessment to learning outcomes and conformity to current best practice, etc.

Clearly there is an extended role for the Vice-President to include:

- Developing a clear leadership role at university level in the development and delivery of high quality education in UCC, including best practice in teaching and learning, assessment and curriculum design;
- Building communication structures through the Schools and Colleges to drive teaching initiatives, support module and programme development, build academic leadership and enhance the university's reputation in teaching and learning;
- Mobilising and managing the expertise and institutional reputation of Ionad Bairre to achieve strategic teaching and learning objectives across the university;
- Establishment of a focused communications structure at university level to enhance the university's education strategy.

Ionad Bairre facilitates cross disciplinary work and this is recognised as very powerful. However Ionad Bairre needs to embrace all of the University. Satellites should be developed in each of the colleges, with the colleges taking more of the responsibility for the T&L agenda.

There is a need for establishment of a system that pulls staff into the centre with clarity and strong leadership. In order to accomplish this, the Office of the VP T&L requires nodes, as currently it can only command its own resources. There is a need for direct input into academic lines and contacts, with development of a 'bottom up' network. The elements are in place but need to be built on and encouraged in the delivery of the institutional strategic priorities in a more proactive way.

The scholarship of teaching and learning concept is a widely used tool supporting a "reflective practitioner" approach, and has many benefits. However other activities are also required based on current needs. There needs to be a recognition that the expertise in

Ionad Bairre needs to be re-channelled to meet the strategic needs of the University at the present time.

The evident expertise in the centre has built up strong academic credibility in the institution and this credibility needs to be re-channelled to become a driver of excellence in T&L at institutional level in addition to targeting individuals in programs and seminars. There is no doubt that the work of the staff of Ionad Bairre has made significant impact on overall standards of T&L at UCC and indeed the improvement of morale of many academics. In a bid to secure institutional recognition, Ionad Bairre has taken on a continually widening and now unsustainable portfolio of work. This needs immediate attention, and hard decisions need to be made as a matter of priority in planning their future work. In order to maximise the innate expertise of Ionad Bairre, and to capitalise on their significant reputation, the centre should be re-positioned to drive wider institutional enhancement of T&L in strategic areas, rather than continuing to respond to individual volunteers.

Parity of esteem between teaching and learning and research will not be simply 'granted' by the University to a teaching and learning unit such as Ionad Bairre, nor will it necessarily occur if the unit develops into an academic research entity in its own right. In fact, in such a case, the unit will then largely become part of the University's research agenda. However, parity of esteem for teaching and learning can be achieved on the evidence of the expertise and impact of the unit's work in working at the heart of academic programmes to achieve highest standards in the university's overall education of the student body. The review considers that this approach will be strengthened by the unit becoming better positioned to undertake a higher-level role in the enhancement of overall teaching and learning standards, drawing on its existing, very positive institutional reputation. Additionally, local enhancement activities by staff need to be empowered, encouraged and rewarded. Preservation of the parity of esteem clause for research and teaching was enshrined in the last two Strategic Plans of UCC.

The Leadership for Teaching and Learning in UCC must be seen as a real partner to Research. The revised role of the VP for T&L will be key in achieving this change. The work plan of Ionad Bairre should be formulated so as to support delivery of the overall goals of the VP for T&L, rather than the VP for T&L managing the Centre's wide remit. The areas that need immediate consideration include:



- An appointment of one full-time Director of Ionad Bairre, with the brief to construct a clear plan of work for the centre's staff;
- A rationalisation of the credited training offerings with a view to supporting and maximising the scope of what Ionad Bairre can do;
- A clear statement about the remit of Ionad Bairre in regard to academic awards in higher education and pedagogic research. The PRG encourages the further development of Ionad Bairre's support function which should take priority over its development as an academic unit. The PRG recommends that students wishing to study at Masters and PhD level be guided by Ionad Bairre and be mentored by Ionad Bairre to draw on local and national opportunities.
- If UCC finds strategic reasons for developing its research agenda to include T&L in higher education, given that the staff at IB constitutes an expertise to build on, the same requirements should apply to this research area as to any other area, including having sufficient critical mass, publishing in internationally recognised peer reviewed journals, attracting funding, having international collaboration etc. The relationship with the School of Education would need to be considered, and made explicit. Most important, such an investment cannot be done at the expense of IBs vital support function.
- The creation of adjunct professor titles for staff of Ionad Bairre could be considered as an alternative means of fulfilling the need of research recognition.

#### Centre for Adult Continuing Education and NAIRTL

Within the Self-Assessment Report the role of the VP for Teaching & Learning is primarily articulated through the activities of the Office of the VPT&L and those who report to that office – as set out in the self assessment report the Office currently comprises Ionad Bairre, CACE and NAIRTL. The Review group did not have a brief to include either CACE or NAIRTL in its review but recommends that the relationship between the Office of VPT&L and both CACE and NAIRTL needs to be clearly defined. The Review group notes that CACE currently reports directly to the VP for T&L who reports to the Registrar and it recommends that this relationship should be continued until such time as the quality review of CACE has been completed and the most appropriate line management of the Centre is established. The group considers that its short interview with the Director of CACE did not reveal immediate synergies with the work of CACE, nor with the new brief that the PRG is recommending for

the OVPT&L. The group suggests that the future of NAIRTL and its relationship with the OVPT&L should become clearer with the establishment of the proposed National Academy for Teaching.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### Recommendations for improvement made by the unit.

In considering its own recommendations the PRG first considered very carefully the recommendations for improvement made in the Self-Assessment Report and have commented briefly on each one below. Consideration of the OVPTL and Ionad Bairre's recommendations is followed by a summary of the PRG's recommendations.

<b>Analysis and Recommendations for improvements in:</b>	<b>Response of the Peer Review Group</b>
<b>Staffing:</b>	
The post of VPTL should be increased from that of half-time post to at least 70% FTE	The seniority and responsibility of the post is such that it should be 100%. Post holder should have demonstrated credibility in academic leadership and teaching
Staff members with current short-term contracts should be issued with contracts of meaningful duration	Core staff should be identified and issued with contracts which allow them to contribute to short and medium term projects
Additional members of staff with specialist skills and teaching experience need to be recruited and given contracts of meaningful duration. This could be achieved through new recruitment or secondment.	To be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy
<b>Budgetary matters:</b>	
Greater annual non-pay budget should be assigned from UCC core funding,	Non pay budget needs to reflect the scope of activities and staffing in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy
OVPTL and Ionad Bairre should apply for external funding. Some mentoring in applying for research grants is needed.	Pursuit of external funding relevant to core priorities, in particular any national or EU development funding should be prioritised. Mentoring in the application for such funding should be obtained.
<b>Communications and space:</b>	

<b>Analysis and Recommendations for improvements in:</b>	<b>Response of the Peer Review Group</b>
Dedicated space is needed for Ionad Bairre's teaching activities.	The Windle building space would provide a single site in which the activities of Ionad Bairre could be consolidated. The adjacent siting of a technology rich classroom would be of immediate value for teaching with technology.
The meetings within Ionad Bairre, and between Ionad Bairre and the OVPTL, should be regularised and structures strengthened	Agree
<b>Teaching and Learning:</b>	
Provide some seminars/workshops in venues that suit staff who work outside of the main campus. Alternate times should also be considered.	Agree
Continue to record/video selected seminars and have these available on the Teaching and Learning website.	Agree
Offering a campus wide course for teaching and learning with technology should be considered. The current course uses Epigeum software as a central e-tutorial resource. Although staff have reacted positively to these e-tutorials, paying for commercial licenses is not seen as sustainable in the long term, and in-house resources are being generated for future courses.	As a matter of priority, a significant e-learning strategy should be drawn up. Such issues should be considered within the strategy.
Maximise the research impact of work done by staff and postgraduate student course participants.	See recommendations below regarding focusing of research
It is recommended that we encourage leadership roles in teaching and learning for 'developed' staff, and increase the range of disciplines represented on the course teams.	These staff should play a key role in supporting the delivery of the VP for T&L's educational strategy and should be actively engaged in this endeavour
Have formal representation from students on course teams (both course participants and the Undergraduate/Postgraduate student body).	Agreed
An additional staff member should be employed to support and develop new opportunities to meet staff and student demand.	To be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy

<b>Analysis and Recommendations for improvements in:</b>	<b>Response of the Peer Review Group</b>
Continue the Course fee waivers for staff and postgraduate students.	Agree
Review the timings and call for course applications and final registration.	As appropriate
Offer a follow-on course for postgraduate students with the assistance of two recently appointed Teaching Fellows. Host resources on a Blackboard site for this course. This is not currently possible due to registration taking place on completion of course.	To be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy
Assert the role of Ionad Bairre as an Academic Centre. Obtain recognition for Ionad Bairre as a course-creator and have FTEs assigned, instead of going to the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences.	The status of the centre should be discussed and agreed within the academic governance structures in the graduate domain. These discussions should incorporate consideration of assignment of FTEs
Strengthen links between parallel initiatives within the institution, eliminating duplication and allowing collaboration.	Agree
Consider dedicated themed seminar series, and tailor some seminars and workshops to the needs of specific Schools.	Agree, to be carried out in a planned and strategic way in line with the overall T&L strategy
Consider offering evening teaching and learning sessions, when additional staff resources become available.	The group would advise caution in consideration of any expansion of current workload, prior to identification of core priorities arising from new strategy
<b>Research work:</b>	
All staff should be given the opportunity to consider their teaching as research. To make this goal real across the university, we need to enhance our current programmes and initiatives through extra staffing (lecturers, researchers, technical support staff, a full time administrator) and substantial resources (financial resources in the form of a core non-pay budget, space, technical equipment).	See recommendations below regarding focusing of research. Expectations of effective teaching across the institution should include, as the norm, evidence-based reflection and be part of regular enhancement of teaching and curriculum design. The unit should play a leading role in supporting such enhancement activity. Further resourcing should be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy

<b>Analysis and Recommendations for improvements in:</b>	<b>Response of the Peer Review Group</b>
<p>Preservation of the parity of esteem clause for research and teaching enshrined in the last two Strategic Plans of UCC.</p>	<p>While the statement about the principle of parity of esteem should be retained, it also has to be underpinned by a clear road map as to how this will be achieved. The review considers that parity of esteem will be strengthened by the unit undertaking a higher-level role in the enhancement of overall teaching and learning standards, drawing on their existing, very positive institutional reputation.</p>
<p>We will continue to encourage staff and postgraduate students who teach to integrate research, teaching and learning and to see their teaching as scholarly activity. To role- model this research focus, we need to continue to find the time to take a research stance ourselves through developing a full data base of our work and other initiatives.</p>	<p>The integration of research and teaching is a fundamental goal of higher education. To support this goal, best practice at school level should be identified and showcased across the university.</p>
<p>In the next phase of our research plan, which must focus on sustainability, we need to get mentoring support to make the most of applications for research grants to develop and consolidate a funding strategy. We will seek international advice and collaboration here.</p>	<p>IB should provide the current evidence base for T&amp;L and foster a scholarly approach to T&amp;L among UCC leaders and staff. The IB staff research focus should be to promote or carry out research that is immediately aligned to its responsibilities in providing support for T&amp;L, and they should maintain their international outlook to the extent it contributes to the quality of their support activities. The ultimate goal should be to contribute to ensuring the excellence of all students learning experience at UCC.</p>
<p>We need to be more strategic regarding the identification and preservation of research time throughout a relentless academic year. We need to block time to write - and have identified the aforementioned 'away days' and the model of 'writer's retreats' as ways forward in the next cycle of work.</p>	<p>Such an initiative might be useful for team building, strategy development and priority setting.</p>
<p>Though we have strong research profiles regarding chapters in books and the editing of books, concomitant with the development of such a new research area, we are now conscious that we need to be more strategic in acquiring profiles in key research journals emergent in the field.</p>	<p>To be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy</p>

<b>Analysis and Recommendations for improvements in:</b>	<b>Response of the Peer Review Group</b>
We need to further develop our public image through the Ionad Bairre’s web presence and other media and to more fully represent our work and achievements.	Agree
More dedicated time to do research is required.	To be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy

**Recommendations for improvement made by the Peer Review Group**

The following recommendations for improvement are made by the PRG in addition to the recommendations for improvement (discussed above) made by the unit under review.

The PRG recommends that:

Office Vice-President for Teaching and Learning

1. The post of the VP for T&L should be full time.
2. The VP for T&L should be a member of University Management Team (Operations).
3. To emphasise parity of esteem, the VP for Teaching & Learning should report to the President as is the case with the VP for Research & Innovation.
4. The university needs to capitalise on the opportunities and value of integration of teaching and research, these should not be separate. The culture for researchers teaching undergraduate students should be encouraging rather than enforcing. A culture where T&L is valued and rewarded but where researchers are not compelled to teach is recommended as one size doesn’t fit all. Top researchers can benefit teaching, without necessarily teaching themselves. They can create exciting, rich environments, by building dynamic and stimulating teams and creating supports, resources and ethos conducive to research led teaching.
5. The VP for T&L should maintain effective working relationships with other key leaders, including and in particular the VP Student Experience, VP Research and

Innovation, Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Director of Planning and Institutional Research, Head of Information Services and Head of Human Resources.

6. The VP for T&L should seek to work in a more formalised and transparent way with student representatives to promote student engagement in quality, as this is fundamental to student centred learning.
7. The challenging nature of the post requires highly developed leadership skills and the capability to deliver a clear and effective educational strategy for the university.
8. The post holder should have an established track record in excellence in teaching and learning as a practitioner and a leader.
9. The VP for T&L should emphasise the need to build and work more closely with a small team of senior academic leaders at College level across the university in order to ensure effective development and enhancement in T&L in Schools and Colleges. The VPTL should also ensure that coherent T&L committee structures are in place both at School and College levels to ensure timely and responsive communication up and down from School to Senior Management. For a proposed structure see Appendix B.
10. The VP for T&L should lead the development of the University Teaching and Learning Strategy for the next 5 year period. The strategy should contain a prioritised list of targets and outcomes.
11. The VP T&L should identify the institution wide KPIs for teaching and learning based on the strategy to ensure a university wide commitment to improvement in T&L.
12. The work of the VP in developing standards in T&L should put a premium on institutional feedback and student engagement data. Effective and visible response to student feedback will close the feedback loop and is likely to increase student participation in feedback.
13. The VP T&L should prioritise the work with academic leaders to enhance the quality of student learning informed by appropriate evidence including student feedback.

14. The VP T&L should direct the activities of Ionad Bairre and the Director of e-Learning team to maximise impact on the student learning experience.
15. As a matter of priority, an explicit e-learning strategy should be drawn up. Such issues should be considered within the strategy.

#### Ionad Bairre

16. Refocusing of Ionad Bairre.
17. Expertise in Ionad Bairre need to be re-channelled to meet the strategic needs of the university.
18. The evident expertise in the centre has built up strong academic credibility in the institution and this credibility needs to be re-channelled to become a driver of excellence in T&L at institutional as well as the individual level.
19. The centre should be re-positioned to drive wider institutional enhancement of T&L in strategic areas, rather than primarily responding to demands led by the already committed teachers.
20. The strategic prioritisation of the teaching and learning function creates a need to embed and develop Ionad Bairre in order to best apply its proven expertise
21. One full-time Director of Teaching and Learning post is created which will incorporate leadership of Ionad Bairre, with the brief to construct a clear plan of work for the centre's staff in line with the strategic plan of the VP T&L.
22. Rationalisation of the credited training offerings should reflect institutional priorities and resource constraints. The PRG recommends that students wishing to study at Masters and PhD level be guided by Ionad Bairre to draw on local and national opportunities.



23. Ionad Bairre staff should go out to work on focussed projects in University schools to address local enhancement needs.
24. Ionad Bairre should focus on empowering and supporting the local pedagogical leaders, i.e. graduates and volunteer staff who are an important resource for promoting and supporting T&L enhancement at school level as change agents.
25. The structure of the recently established T&L Fellowship scheme should be developed to ensure that fellows are also change agents and that they can be further encouraged and supported to take on future academic leadership roles.
26. The Fellows should also be mobilised as a key group to focus on specific University wide policies such as assessment and e-learning etc.
27. Core staff should be identified and issued with contracts which allow them to contribute to short and medium term projects in line with the developing remit of the VP T&L.
28. The Non pay budget needs to reflect the scope of activities and staffing in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy.
29. The pursuit of external funding relevant to core priorities, in particular any national or EU development funding should be prioritised. Mentoring in the application for such funding should be obtained.
30. The Windle building space be used to provide a single site in which the activities of Ionad Bairre could be consolidated. The adjacent siting of a technology rich classroom would be of immediate value for teaching with technology.
31. Caution is exercised in consideration of any other expansion of current workload, prior to identification of core priorities arising from the new strategy.
32. Expectations of effective teaching across the institution should include, as the norm, evidence-based reflection and be part of regular enhancement of teaching and

curriculum design. The unit should play a leading role in supporting such enhancement activity. Further resourcing should be considered in line with identification of core priorities arising from new strategy.

33. While stating the principle of parity of esteem should be retained, it also has to be underpinned by a clear road map as to how this will be achieved. The review considers that parity of esteem will be strengthened by the unit undertaking a higher-level role in the enhancement of overall teaching and learning standards, drawing on their existing, very positive institutional reputation.

34. The integration of research and teaching is a fundamental goal of higher education. Ionad Bairre should continue to support this goal through identification and sharing of best practice across all areas of the University.

35. The Ionad Bairre staff research focus should be to promote or carry out research that is immediately aligned to its responsibilities in providing support for T&L, and they should maintain their international outlook to the extent it contributes to the quality of their support activities. The ultimate goal should be to contribute to ensuring the excellence of the learning experience of all students at UCC.

36. The creation of adjunct professor titles for staff of Ionad Bairre could be considered as a means of fulfilling the need of research recognition.

#### CACE and NAIRTL

37. The relationship between the Office of VPT&L and both CACE and NAIRTL needs to be clearly defined.

## APPENDIX A

### OFFICE OF VICE PRESIDENT FOR TEACHING & LEARNING (OVPTL) & IONAD BAIRRE

#### PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT TIMETABLE

##### In Summary

- Monday 26 March: The Peer Review Group (PRG) arrives at the River Lee Hotel for a briefing followed by an informal meeting with staff members.
- Tuesday 27 March: The PRG considers the Self-Assessment Report and meets with staff, student and stakeholder representatives. A working private dinner is held that evening for the PRG.
- Wednesday 28 March: The PRG meets with relevant officers of UCC. An exit presentation is given by the PRG to all staff members. A working private dinner is held that evening for the PRG in order to finalise the report. This is the final evening of the review.
- Thursday 29 March: External PRG members depart.

<b>Monday 26 March 2012</b>	
16.30	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group Briefing by Deirdre O'Brien, Administrative Officer, Quality Promotion Unit. 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.
19.00	Informal dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Vice President for Teaching & Learning and Office of Vice-President for Teaching & Learning (OVPTL) / Ionad Bairre staff members .  OVPTL / Ionad Bairre staff members:  Ms. Mary Clohessy, Executive Assistant, Ionad Bairre Dr. Bettie Higgs, Co-Director Ionad Bairre Dr. Marian McCarthy, Co-Director Ionad Bairre Ms. Mary O'Rourke, Senior Executive Assistant, Office of Vice-President Teaching & Learning  <i>Professor G Neville did not attend due to illness</i>
<b>Tuesday 27 March 2012</b>	
08.30	Convening of Peer Review Group
08.45	Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Senior VP Academic

09.15	Professor Grace Neville, VP for Teaching & Learning
10.00	<p><u>Group meeting with OVPTL / Ionad Bairre staff:</u></p> <p>Ms Mary Clohessy  Dr Bettie Higgs  Mr Patrick Kiely  Dr Marion McCarthy  Ms Mary O'Rourke</p> <p><i>Professor G Neville did not attend due to illness</i></p>
11.00	<i>Tea/coffee</i>
11.30	<p><u>Individual private meetings with staff members</u></p> <p>11.30: Ms Mary Clohessy  11.45: Dr Bettie Higgs  12.00: Mr Patrick Kiely  12.15: Dr Marion McCarthy  12.30: Ms Mary O'Rourke</p>
12.45	Working lunch
14.00	Visit to core facilities of OVPTL & Ionad Bairre, escorted by Dr Bettie Higgs, Ms Mary O'Rourke and Mr Patrick Kiely.
15.00	<p><u>Representatives of UCC Staff</u></p> <p>Professor Alan Kelly, Dean of Graduate Studies  Dr Declan Kennedy, School of Education (Ionad Bairre Course Team)  Ms Michelle Nelson, Head of Graduate Studies Office  Ms Mary O'Grady, Director, Disability Support Service  Ms Rose-Mary Walsh, Centre Manager, Centre for Adult Continuing Education</p>
15.30	<p><u>Ionad Bairre Students</u></p> <p><u>Staff: Certificate/Diploma/Masters Programme</u></p> <p>Maeve Bent (Access Office)  Ger O'Keeffe (Medicine and Health)  Deirdre Parker (Careers)  Emanuelle Schon (Business and Law)  Aileen Waterman (Careers)</p> <p><u>Postgraduate Students: PG6003 Teaching and Learning for Graduate Studies</u></p> <p>Ross Griffin (English)  Sara Goek (History)  Esther Luetzgen  Michael Naughton  Aonghus Sugrue (AFIS)</p>
16.00	<p><u>Ionad Bairre Course Team</u></p> <p>Mr Daniel Blackshields (Teaching Fellow)  Mr James Cronin (Teaching Fellow)</p>

	Dr Ciaran Dawson (Teaching Fellow) Ms Jacinta McKeon Dr Eleanor O'Sullivan
16.30	<u>Heads of Colleges (or nominees):</u> Professor Neil Collins, Acting Head of College of Business and Law Professor Patrick Fitzpatrick, Head, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science Ms Kathryn Neville, College Manager, College of Medicine & Health Professor David Ryan, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences
17.00	<u>Representatives of external stakeholders</u> Professor Kathy Bruner, West Virginia University Ms. Maria Buckley, NAIRTL Dr. Robert Cosgrave, former employee Ms. Linda Kelly, Membership Officer, AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access & Disability) Ms. Tina Neylon, Co-ordinator, Cork Lifelong Learning Festival Dr. Catherine O'Mahony, NAIRTL Dr. Caroline O'Reilly, CIT Mr. Lewis Purser, Irish Universities Association Professor Richard Smosner, West Virginia University
18.00	Dr. Michael Murphy, President
19.30	Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day followed by a working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group
<b>Wednesday 28 March 2012</b>	
08.30	Convening of Peer Review Group
09.30	Ms. Mary Ward, HR Business Manager, Central Administration
09.45	Mr Ronan Madden, Arts and Humanities Llonad Bairrerarian
10.15	Professor Anita Maguire, VP for Research & Innovation
10.30	Tea/coffee
11.00	Mr. Cormac McSweeney, Finance Office
11.15	Mr Tim O'Donovan, Learning Technologies Unit
11.30	Dr. Michael Byrne, Acting VP for the Student Experience and Head, Student Health Department.
11.45	<u>Chairs of College/Faculty Committees responsible for Teaching &amp; Learning:</u> Dr. Edmond Byrne, College of Science, Engineering & Food Science Dr. Seamus O'Reilly, Chair AC e-learning committee. Dr. Aine Ryall, Law Faculty

	Professor David Ryan, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences
12.15	Private discussion
12.45	Ms. Marita Foster, Acting International Education Officer
13.00	Dr. Seamus O'Tuama, Director, Centre for Adult & Continuing Education
13.15	Dr. Rónán Ó Dubhghaill, Director of Planning & Institutional Research
13.30	Dr Maeve Lankford, HR, Learning & Development
13.45	Working lunch
14.30	Preparation of first draft of final report
17.00	Exit presentation to all staff made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. This presentation is <u>not</u> for discussion at this time.
19.00	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for completion and submission of final report.

## **Appendix B**

### **Possible Structure for Driving Institutional Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

**VP for T&L**  
**Possible Structure for Driving Institutional Excellence in Teaching and Learning**  
**Focusing on Key Academic Projects**  
 (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> Year Engagement, Technology supported Learning, Graduate Attributes, Incorporating International students,





