

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Department of Accounting, Finance & Information  
Systems**

**Academic Year 2005/06**

**Confidential  
15<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

## **PEER REVIEW**

### **Members of the Peer Review Group:**

Professor Bernard Hanzon, School of Mathematical Sciences, UCC (Chair)

Mr. Martin Hayes, Computer Centre, UCC

Professor Louis Murray, School of Business, UCD

Mr. Damian Nestor, EMC Ireland, Cork

Professor Jean-Charles Pomerol, Président, Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris

Professor Michael Ryan, School of Computing, DCU

Professor John Samuels, The Birmingham Business School, University of  
Birmingham, UK

### **Timetable of the site visit**

The timetable for the visit was very tight, particularly for such a large Department - effectively two departments. The timetable is attached as Appendix A.

### **Methodology**

While Accounting, Finance and Information Systems (AFIS) form a single department, it has two separate units or groups, Accounting & Finance (AF) on the one hand and Information Systems, hereafter referred to as Business Information Systems (BIS), on the other. These two groups operate independently for most purposes. Each group undertook its own self-assessment and produced a separate self-assessment report. Prior to the visit of the Peer Review Group, it had been decided that a single review would be carried out for the Department although a separate review for each group had been considered.

The Peer Review Group divided into two groups on the first day for the meetings with individual staff members and with students. Also, each of the members focused on a particular area such as organisation, teaching, research, external relations, etc. in either AF or BIS for the duration of the visit. However, all the members participated in, and shared responsibility for, all aspects of the analysis and of this report.

### **Peer Review Group Report**

The main findings in the report were agreed prior to the exit presentation on the

afternoon of the second day. The report was finalised via e-mail communications by the members over the following weeks.

## **OVERALL ANALYSIS**

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

Two very comprehensive Self-Assessment Reports were provided, one by the AF group and one by the BIS group. The SAR submitted by AF placed a very strong emphasis on structural issues and on the filling of the vacant Chair of Accounting, while there was no specific mention of these issues in the report from BIS.

### **Benchmarking**

The Peer Review Group appreciated the clear benchmarking provided by the AF group. While there was evidence that BIS has been benchmarking itself against various universities on an ongoing basis, and reference was made to some comparisons with other universities in the SAR, it was not explicitly.

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

### **Organisation and Planning**

The overall structure of the Department is not good. While officially AFIS is a single Department, in practice it operates as two different functional groups, which are together for historical reasons only. The development of both groups is at present being held back by the structure of the Department. The point is validly made that for fifteen of the sixteen years of the Department's existence, it was headed by the Professor of Accounting. Indeed for much of that time BIS were the much smaller partner and didn't have any professor while AF had two! The AF group, in particular, need leadership, direction and additional resources. The reason for bringing the two groups together, it would appear, was to develop the synergies between the two disciplines, and particularly between BIS and Management Accounting. Now however, the arguments in favour of separating the two groups far outweigh any advantages to be derived from maintaining them as a single Department.

Therefore the Peer Review Group recommends splitting AFIS into two separate departments - Accounting & Finance and Business Information Systems.

Arguments that can be used to justify dividing the Department into two include:

- a) From the point of view of academic disciplines there is no need for these two subjects to be together.
- b) In terms of size, at present the Department is an oddity. Both AF and BIS are large enough to be self-standing. They would be two of the larger departments in the new College of Business and Law. This applies whether size is measured in terms of either student numbers or academic staff.
- c) The University itself seems to be confused. Figures produced by the Finance Office and figures produced for student/academic staff ratios show the two subject areas as separate. In many ways the University already treats the two units as separate departments, which should ease a structural change in this respect. The Peer Review Group were given to understand that there were discussions at university level on the Department dividing into two entities in 2002. In fact, the PRG found that both students and staff perceive the Department as two separate units. Students, past and present, identify with one area or the other.
- d) If the two groups were organized into separate entities, the PRG considered it to be likely that collaboration between them would be enhanced rather than diminished.

A successful separation would be achieved only if the arrangements were acceptable to both groups. At present there is an element of uncertainty and insecurity in relation to each group and this hampers their development. The AF group lacks leadership and this could be addressed by expediting the appointment of a Professor of Accounting, followed by the filling of two other vacant senior positions. In order to attract a Professor of Accounting, the PRG were of the opinion that it is very important for potential candidates to know whether the successful applicant would

have the opportunity to be Head of a separate unit, or to be a second Chair in a large department. If the new Professor is to be Head of Accounting & Finance and is given one or two appointments to fill, it should be possible to attract a good person. It is doubtful whether a real leader would want to join the present set up and play second fiddle to a very successful BIS group with a very good entrepreneurial leader.

The Peer Review Group found that most of the staff in AF were very enthusiastic and had accomplished a great deal particularly in teaching but some also in research. Many of them are quite young with a much more positive view of the Department than the Self-Assessment Report might indicate. Therefore, there is great potential for future development provided that strong leadership is put in place without delay.

Despite the very significant success of BIS in attracting more high calibre students than any other information systems degree course in Ireland, senior management in UCC still has difficulty accepting its area of study as an authentic discipline in its own right and understanding the importance of having it located within the business area. Information Systems Science (ISS) is a well established field of research since the seventies. It is a field at the crossroad between information technologies, organisations, management, sociology, decision theory and practice and artificial intelligence. This field has its journals, its international organisations and conferences (International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP), European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), International Society for Decision Support Systems (ISDSS) etc.) ISS deals with how to use computers in organisations, how to manage information and knowledge in organisations, how to introduce change in organisations with or without technological change, how to leverage knowledge, how to facilitate operations by making appropriate use of technologies such as management information systems, decision support systems, enterprise resource planning, data mining, and Internet/WWW based tools and services. In addition it deals with organizational learning. Departments devoted to ISS can be found in many major universities.

The identity of the BIS group, which provides a strong presence for UCC in the world of Information Sciences, must be confirmed in its status at the crossroad of business, management, organization and information technologies studies. Its future within the

College of Business and Law should be guaranteed and this should also become clear from the way BIS will be embedded in the new structure of the College of Business and Law. Its work is different in content and emphasis to that of a Computer Science department, and should be recognized as being so. Such recognition is needed as a basis for co-operation between BIS and Computer Science.

### **Resources**

In common with other universities, the PRG were of the opinion that UCC treats the Business Studies subjects as a means of generating money for the University. The student/academic staff ratio in AF is over 31 and in BIS is over 27. With these ratios it is hardly surprising that the research output of the Department is below average. The BIS subject area is a great credit to UCC and is very well respected. The PRG considered that the AF subject area has the potential to make a major contribution to the image of UCC in the business community. However without sufficient financial transparency and guarantees about how much money will be invested in this area in the coming years, the PRG considered it would be difficult for these areas to have a flagship role. Once this transparency is provided the Department should take up the challenge to build up its research activities. The PRG recommended that clear plans should be drawn up to justify the investment by the University.

The PRG was unable to get a clear picture of the funding situation in the Department, in particular as far as the allocation of HEA Skills Programme funding is concerned. Nevertheless it would appear that while the HEA funds the BIS group under the Skills Programme based on the weighting of a science discipline, not all of this funding is passed on by UCC to the unit and there is a perception within BIS that much of its funding is used to support programmes elsewhere in the University. As a result, it perceives that it loses a substantial amount of the income it generates to the science area despite BIS being the largest laboratory discipline in UCC. The HEA representative made it clear that in their view, while short-term adjustments could be accommodated, in the long run all the HEA Skills Programme funding should eventually go to the Department/Group to which it was allocated by the HEA.

The PRG recommended that the funding process in relation to the HEA Skills Programme funding be made much more transparent.

At the moment it is difficult for the Department to invest more money in longer term research projects, even if there is money for this at present, because there is no guarantee that funding will be there in the future. The Department should be given the opportunity to invest money in the development of the research programme which will be badly needed if it is to contribute to the targets concerning fourth level education that the University has set itself. Given the good contacts with the business community, such an investment can lead to more research paid for by external sources as well. Of course the Department should show clear progress with their research programme for such an investment to last.

### **Opportunities for Development**

The accounting scandals in some of the top multinationals in recent years have heightened the profile of the accounting profession and have generated intense interest in corporate governance and related issues. This is an area that overlaps the disciplines of both accounting and finance and the Department is therefore very well positioned to avail of the opportunities presented by the new regulatory environment. Closer collaboration with the Department of Law could also be considered in this context.

### **Administrative Staff in AF**

The administrative staff in a department are often the first point of contact for many of the students. Their relationship with the students is an important one and therefore their input can be particularly valuable. In the discussions held with the administrative staff in AF, it became clear that the staff felt they could play a greater role in a number of areas including the placement programme, the Open Day and liaising with disabled students. The PRG felt that the willingness of the administrative staff to get more involved in the activities of the AF group was very encouraging and that it would clearly be to everyone's advantage to respond positively to their suggestions.

### **Administrative, Technical and Laboratory staff in BIS**

The administrative staff members play a central role in the running of BIS. It is clear that the outstanding success of the Work Placement programme is due to the

enormous work put in by the administrative staff under the leadership of the Director of Administration and Student Services. Their role in meeting students, producing the anthology, and mentoring students is key to ensuring the excellence of BIS students. The technical support staff and the laboratory instructor play a pivotal role in ensuring that students maximise the benefit that they receive from their laboratory time and the additional work of the laboratory instructor in helping on student work placement was acknowledged by the PRG.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The Mission Statement of UCC includes the words “to create, preserve and communicate knowledge...”. The Department, both in terms of AF and BIS certainly is exceptional in communicating knowledge. The students and alumni of the Department praised the level of teaching, the innovative approaches adopted and the commitment and the willingness of staff to help students. It was difficult to find areas of the teaching programme to criticise. The Department certainly meets the needs of its students. The Department attracts students of good quality. There is a 95%+ completion rate amongst students who enter the Department’s programmes. Employers spoke very well of graduates from the Department. The work placement programme was particularly valued by students and employers.

### **Teaching & Learning - AF**

The PRG were pleased to report that it found a very high standard of teaching. It was clear that the academic staff are highly dedicated, that they are keenly interested in their students, and that they continue to develop new teaching techniques to better serve their discipline, and their students.

Following meetings with most members of academic staff in the subject area, it was clear to the PRG that they are very dedicated, that they are seriously concerned with the interests of their students, and they are committed to continuously improving their lecturing techniques. The fact that many of them undertake student surveys on the quality of lecture courses, and actively respond to student comments, is testament to this. Many academics in AF have initiated this examination of the quality of their teaching in advance of the introduction of a required system of formalised assessment

by the University. The PRG considered that UCC's plan to introduce such a system of formalised teaching assessment throughout the University, is to be welcomed.

Formal meetings with a representative sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students confirmed the observations of the PRG regarding the quality of teaching, and the dedication of academic staff. It was clear that students have a high regard for their lecturers, and for the quality of courses in their degree programmes. External members of the PRG noted that, despite their best attempts, they were not able to elicit any serious criticisms from the students. Previous experiences of the members of the PRG informed the Group that such a positive student response from students would not be expected in many other university departments.

The PRG also noted the continued development of AF as a discipline in UCC, through the introduction of more specialised degree programmes, such as the BSc (Accounting) Degree and the BSc (Finance) Degree. These programmes are highly regarded both by students, and by employers, and indicate a preparedness on the part of the AF group to respond to developments in the subject area and to changes in employment needs.

A number of students and graduates, and at least one employer, expressed concern that Accounting is not available as a major in the B.Comm Degree. The possibility of re-introducing this should be considered as should the introduction of a Masters in Accounting, since each of these should provide more exemptions in the professional examinations. The introduction of a Masters in Accounting will, however, require further funding as teaching loads are already excessively high.

The PRG wished to formally recognise, and to compliment members of the AF group, for the quality of their teaching, and for the commitment they have to their students. The PRG recommended that a more formal system of recognition of teaching quality be established at University level. The quality of its teaching clearly is one of the measures of quality of a University.

In conclusion, the PRG wished to comment on teaching loads in AF. The impression received by the PRG was that teaching responsibilities are evenly spread among the

academic staff. However, with a student/academic staff ratio of 31/1 it was difficult to reconcile the resulting heavy teaching commitment with the specified University objective of encouraging high levels of research activity. The PRG also received the impression that most academics, including those who hold fixed term contract positions and are required to successfully complete a doctorate, are required to carry a sizable administrative load associated with their teaching commitments. Under these circumstances, it is remarkable that some members of the staff maintain a high research production.

### **Teaching & Learning – BIS**

#### ***Undergraduate: B.Sc. Business Information Systems***

The B.Sc. Degree in Business Information Systems attracts far more applications than any other degree in information systems in Ireland. It has a large intake of students (c.130 each year), who, on graduating, have little difficulty in finding appropriate employment. It is clearly a very successful programme.

The BIS programme is a four-year undergraduate programme combining the study of business disciplines with information systems, and includes a highly valued six-month work placement after the Third Year. The academic programme provides students with a rigorous grounding in the working of modern businesses as well as the capability to analyse, develop and implement information systems in a business environment.

In the discussions with the students, staff and graduates the reasons for the success of the programme that became most evident to the PRG were:

1. The exceptionally high level of interest shown by staff, academic, administrative, technical and laboratory, in the welfare and success of the students. Staff are readily available to meet students, and are seen by students as very approachable and helpful. Students feel valued and respected. They feel that their opinions are heard and acted upon when appropriate. Student morale is unusually high, and the drop-out rate is very low.

2. Failure rates are very low compared to computing degrees. Almost all students achieve a good level of mastery of the material. Clearly the standard of teaching is high.
3. The BIS group organises work placements in Ireland and abroad. These are targeted at the specific requirements of the Degree, and make an important contribution to student development. A considerable effort by both academic and academic support staff is involved.
4. The computing laboratories are of high standard and well managed.
5. The BIS group organises various social events, and opportunities for informal discussions between staff and students.
6. The content of the Degree is changed to keep in touch with developments, and to improve it generally. In some cases changes arise from student suggestions, for example with regard to clarifying the purpose of First Year subjects.
7. The overall design of the Degree and balance between technical and non-technical subjects is good, and works well.

The issues that emerged from these discussions, and which the Peer Review Group felt should be addressed, were:

1. As academic staff involvement in research increases, maintaining the current level of accessibility to students and involvement with their development will become difficult. The current student/academic staff ratio of about 27/1 is high, and will need to be reduced as research activities increase to ensure that the current standards in teaching and learning are maintained.
2. There may be a case for greater emphasis on technical foundations in the B.Sc. to ensure that graduates are flexible and can adapt readily to new environments. Underlying principles in programming and information systems

change very slowly, and once understood, allow new languages and systems to be grasped fairly readily, something that is important for all graduates.

3. Greater University support is desirable for the work placement programme run by the BIS group.
4. The number of technical support staff seems low in relation to the scale and complexity of the operation.
5. Other relatively minor matters which arose were:
  - a. Better scheduling of student assignments to avoid deadlines coinciding – this appeared to be in hand already.
  - b. Standard of lecture halls; as an example a lecture hall in the Kane building was mentioned with sub-standard audio-visual equipment.
  - c. Better explication of the overall course structure, objectives and career opportunities in first year – this appeared to be in hand already.

### ***Diploma in Applied Business Computing***

This inter-institutional community based diploma programme is coordinated by BIS, and is run in conjunction with a number of partners, aiming to provide students from socially disadvantaged areas with the opportunity to pursue a career in IT.

In all of the programmes offered by BIS, the key strengths lie in the diversity of material taught, namely a highly-desirable balance between information systems and general business content. This diversity, combined with a strong focus on industry needs, has meant that BIS Degree offers graduates with opportunities for exceptionally high rates of employment. As a consequence, BIS has been able to maintain high enrolment and retention rates over the years, although the group has been affected by the global downturn in technology-related industries and, more importantly, the perception among students and parents that jobs in IT-related fields are scarce and transient. Changing this perception is one of the key challenges facing

BIS in the coming years. BIS is in a strong position to address this challenge, partly due to the fact that the BIS Advisory Board provides the group with good insights into industry needs, and partly due to the evidence of the employability of the graduates as well as the undergraduate work placement programme. The BIS group needs to continue to innovate both in terms of curriculum and how this curriculum is delivered. The post-graduate programmes have not been as resilient to changes in the global economy as the undergraduate programme, and effort needs to be spent on addressing the specific challenges described for the various MBS programmes. In addition, as computer-based information systems now permeate all institutions and organisations in knowledge-based societies, there is significant scope to expand service teaching of applied IT topics and information systems into all academic disciplines across the university. The relevance of IS/IT topics could be more apparent if they were tailored to meet the needs of specific disciplines across faculties and colleges.

### ***Postgraduate Programmes in BIS***

The following postgraduate programmes are referred to in the BIS Self-Assessment Report:

MBS Business Information Systems

MBS Electronic Business and Commerce

MBS Management Information and Managerial Accounting Systems

H.Dip. in Business and Financial Information Systems

The Self-Assessment Report gave details of core strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities to be pursued, and threats to be addressed, and also provided an overall analysis for each programme.

Discussions with staff, students and graduates did not lead to any noteworthy additional points. The students, while in good heart, did not seem to have the same level of enthusiasm as was so strikingly evident in the undergraduate students, and this might be worth looking into.

### ***Service Teaching***

BIS provides a wide range of modules into other degree programmes. These were described in the Self-Assessment Report, which gave details of core strengths, areas

for improvement, opportunities to be pursued, and threats to be addressed, and also provided an overall analysis for each programme.

This area was not specifically dealt with in any detail by the Peer Review Group.

### **Tutors**

Staff in both AF and BIS groups mentioned the variable quality of the tutors employed by the Department. The time was not available to investigate this more fully. The PRG recognised that a Department can be constrained on a number of fronts when recruiting tutors. However, since the issue was mentioned a number of times, the PRG felt that the issue should be examined by the Department to see how the situation can, if possible, be improved.

### **Placement**

Two of the undergraduate courses offered by the Department - the BSc in Business Information Systems and the BSc Finance - include a six-month placement and the MBS in Management Information and Managerial Accounting includes an internship programme. The PRG wished to compliment the Department on the introduction of the work placement element in these programmes. Both students and employers made specific reference to this particular development, and commented very positively on it. Students from other courses were very much in favour of having a placement element incorporated into their programmes. It was clear that it has been very successful and the PRG strongly supported the proposal to extend the BSc Accounting from a three-year to a four-year programme so as to accommodate a placement in the Third Year.

The BIS group manages all aspects of the work placement for the BSc in Information Systems. This is a big load to carry since it requires a significant input from the staff and particularly from the Head of Department and the Director of Administration and Student Services. However, it has resulted in great benefits for the students and for the employers and it has provided the group with the opportunity to develop a strong relationship with some of the world's top financial services companies - a relationship which should pay dividends with openings for significant research. Most of the

placements are in the Boston area of the US and the students have competed successfully against the best that the prestigious universities in this area have to offer.

As has been mentioned already, it was clear that the administrative staff in AF felt that there was scope for a greater involvement on their part in the work of the Department. In particular, they expressed a strong willingness to provide more assistance with the placement programmes. The PRG supported the greater involvement of the administrative staff in the placement programme and believes that their contribution would further enhance the already successful placement programmes in Accounting and Finance.

### **Careers Guidance**

Students in both AF and in BIS said that there was scope for considerable improvement in the guidance provided about subject choices and about careers. They mentioned that information is provided in Second Year about careers talks being given by employers, but at the time the importance of attending such talks was not obvious to them. Similarly, decisions in relation to subject choices are, in many cases, taken before the student has come to realise the long-term significance of such decisions. The PRG was given the impression that students were not fully aware of the significance of the careers guidance supports offered at the time. The PRG noted and commended the career guidance supports organised by the Department, while noting the comments of the students.

The PRG recommended that the Department should review its career guidance support activities with a view to seeing where improvement in the guidance on subject choices and careers could be made.

### **RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY**

The PRG recommended that arrangements are put in place, and/or strengthened where already existing, in both BIS and AF, to assist lecturers who are in the process of completing studies for a PhD qualification. The arrangements should consist of a worked out plan that includes a time-schedule for completion of the thesis and the PhD defense. An important element would be the reduction of the teaching load

during one teaching period, in order to facilitate the PhD completion. The Head of Department should review progress against the plans on a regular basis and set priorities where necessary to ensure that the Department's teaching output overall is maintained. The scheme would require a financial investment to make this possible e.g. by recruiting part time lecturers. The PRG saw such an investment as a good usage of some of the HEA Skills Programme money that the University receives due to the teaching activities of the Department.

### **Research**

It is unfortunate that the data supplied by the University central administration to the PRG regarding the research output of the Department of AFIS was less than perfect and clearly inferior to the data provided by the Department itself in the Self Assessment Reports. This state of affairs could give the impression to people in the central University that the Department is very poor in its research output. This is in fact not so. The Department is far from outstanding but the PRG considered its research activity to be a lot better than appears on the central data base.

The central University records show that many people in the Department of AFIS are not undertaking research. In fact for at least the last five years a number of members of the Department of AFIS have been very research active. These publications are missing from the central University records.

The BIS group is taking steps to improve their research position. The staff in the AF group need leadership, particularly in the accounting subject group. The appointment of a Professor of Accounting should be of great assistance.

### **Research – Business Information Systems**

The BIS group has Information Systems Science (ISS) as its field of study. Of the 21 staff in the BIS group, eight have substantial research activities. The remarkable fact about this is that most of these staff are young and three of them have not yet completed their PhD studies. It was evident in the interviews that the whole group has a "research culture" which means that they have strived for Ph.D. quality and that all the staff are encouraged to publish and to participate in international conferences,

which they do effectively. This search for research excellence is also shared by the administrative staff who understand and support the challenge.

The core of the five senior staff has attained an international recognition. They are very active and have published many papers in some of the best journals of the field. They have published more than five books, contributed to chapters in more than ten books and an encyclopaedia. They have organized in Cork two of the most important international conferences in the domain: European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS) in 1997 and International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP) (WG 8.3) in 2002. They are frequently requested as referees in many journals, participate in the programme committees of international conferences and more significant, to the editorial boards of several journals. There is no doubt that they participate at the best level in the international stream of research in ISS.

The very impressive motivation and solidarity of the whole staff for improving research effectiveness and participating in the publication effort was stressed by the PRG. The main weakness of the group was considered to be the large number of lecturers that are engaged in the process of completion of studies for a PhD qualification and cannot therefore fully participate in the publication effort.

Another important point is the capacity to attract new PhD students, especially from outside UCC. For instance, the BIS group must endeavour to increase the number of research Masters progressing into the PhD programme. The PRG suggested two ways of achieving this:

- improve the motivation of BIS students and Masters students for research. Particularly interesting was the fact that the students in the Masters programme did not seem to have a clear idea of the advantage of getting a PhD as regards international standards for high level management in companies. They had no clear vision of the benefit of the professional training provided by completing a PhD qualification. The PRG suggested that perhaps some specific action should be undertaken for research Masters students. On the other hand, it was noticeable that all the Masters and PhD students interviewed

acknowledged the total availability and support of other staff, notably their supervisors.

- the second action recommended was the seeking of financial support from companies for PhD students.

Given that only fifty percent of the HEA Skills Programme monies is given to the BIS group at the postgraduate level (less than 15% at the undergraduate level), it seemed to the PRG that an obvious solution would be to increase the proportion of available Skills Programme monies for specific actions for attracting and funding new PhD candidates.

To summarize, the BIS group has already achieved a real success in terms of being internationally renowned. The PRG were of the opinion that this success must be confirmed by achieving similar recognition of the status of BIS as a teaching and research unit within UCC, as an autonomous entity within the College of Business and Law, cultivating active links with the management and finance areas. The PRG suggested that special attention must be paid to research Masters students, and to the links and progression between Masters and PhD programmes in order to increase the number of PhD candidates, especially PhDs destined to occupy executive positions within companies. While the research relationships of the BIS group with companies and groups within the USA and the UK are very good, the development of relations with groups and institutions in continental Europe was also recommended. Developments of such links would enable the BIS group to apply for European research grants as well as for national and international grants.

The final recommendation of the PRG in this area was that the BIS group, which provides a strong presence for UCC in the world of Information Sciences, must be confirmed in its status at the crossroad of business, management, organization and information technologies studies within the College of Business and Law. The economic interest of attracting students with various backgrounds, particularly from non-Science backgrounds, to information science studies must be supported by a re-distribution of HEA Skills Programme monies and this money should be used primarily to increase the number of research Masters and PhD students within BIS.

### **Information on Research**

Some of the junior members of staff in both AF and BIS suggested that the senior staff should provide more help and guidance on research, particularly on identifying research opportunities, funding, etc. A mentoring approach could be adopted within the Department to address this issue.

## **EXTERNAL RELATIONS - The Department With The Wider Community**

### **Industry**

The BIS group, through its established Industry Advisory Board, has developed a world class undergraduate work placement programme over a number of years. This is a well recognised and respected programme that has greatly enhanced the profile of the BIS group with industry.

The Peer Review Group strongly recommended the establishment of an Industry Advisory Board for the AF group, comparable to the programme currently in operation in the BIS group.

The AF group currently has a placement programme for the BSc Finance undergraduates only. Plans to extend this to the BSc Accounting programme were welcomed by the PRG.

### **Professional Bodies**

The AF group has established links with the three main professional accountancy bodies. Eight of the thirteen academic staff are members of one these bodies, and the group has secured exemptions from professional examinations for students on its programmes.

The PRG considered that this relationship needs to be fostered further to ensure that opportunities for exemptions are maximised and that any further opportunities are explored to reflect developments in the profession. Senior staff appointments in the AF group are critical for the further development of this relationship.

## **Corporate College**

The BIS Group has proposed developing the Corporate College concept and this was supported by the Faculty of Commerce. The PRG recommended that the feasibility of such a significant development should be investigated further. It is an innovation which the PRG believed should be encouraged by UCC as it would further enhance the relationship with business and industry and would have indirect benefits across the Department of AFIS and the University.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

### **Recommendations for improvement made by AF**

The PRG endorsed the following recommendations made by the staff in the AF group in the Self-Assessment Report. (*Comments from the Peer Review Group are in italics*):

1. prioritise research and expand research output
2. re-focus and expand the postgraduate programmes
3. maintain and enhance the high quality of the undergraduate programmes
4. maintain and enhance the quality of the student experience
5. Creation of an autonomous structure for Accounting and Finance which will
  - a. allow AF to play a fuller role within and outside the University.
  - b. improve strategic planning in AF
  - c. improve internal management of AF.
  - d. provide a clear line of communication between AF and the Executive Dean. *This will be helped also by filling the Chair of Accounting.*
  - e. facilitate a pro-active role for AF within the College of Business and Law
  - f. facilitate interdisciplinary links between AF and areas such as Law and Management

6. Recruit a Professor of Accounting and a Professor of Corporate Finance which will
  - a. improve mentoring of staff
  - b. reduce the administrative burden on existing staff
  - c. increase the profile of Accounting & Finance within and outside the university
  - d. improve staff profile internally and externally

*The PRG recommended that the Professor of Accounting be recruited first and that he/she should have a say in the filling of the other professorship and one other senior post.*

7. Enhance the roles of the administrative staff specifically in the areas of work placement supervision; liaison with International Student Office; liaison with Disability Support Services; Postgraduate Admissions; Career Services; Schools Open Days. This will
  - a. increase the effectiveness of delivery of administrative functions
  - b. provide for better use of existing competencies
  - c. enhance relations with administrative support services
  - d. reduce the administrative burden on academic staff
  - e. increase job satisfaction for administrative staff.

8. Increase numbers on postgraduate programmes. This will help to
  - a. link teaching and research competencies with market needs
  - b. generate funding to be used to support PhD students

*The PRG recommended, in particular, increasing the number of research-based postgraduate students.*

9. Introduce a new four year BSc Accounting to replace the existing three-year programme which would enhance the quality of the programme with introduction of work placement and a broader curriculum which includes more focus on case-based learning.

*The PRG strongly supported the inclusion of work placement in Accounting programmes. However the PRG encouraged the Department to explore how best*

*to incorporate the work placement module into the programme. The possibility of retaining the three-year BSc Accounting Degree accompanied with the development of a two-year Masters containing a work placement element, or of moving to a four-year BSc Accounting Degree containing a work placement element, possibly followed by a one-year Masters, should also be considered.*

10. Create an Industry Board for BSc Accounting to enhance the quality of the programme and to enhance employment opportunities.

*The PRG endorsed this recommendation and noted the outstanding success of the Advisory Board in BIS. Based on discussions with employers, the PRG believed that the input of the Board could be very valuable in negotiating exemptions with the professional bodies.*

11. Provision of dedicated seminar/meeting/tutorial room to facilitate more rational timetabling of postgraduate programmes and daytime tutorials and to provide a meeting space for interdisciplinary research

*The PRG endorsed this recommendation and urged the University to consider the accommodation issue in the context of potential income generating executive business programmes.*

*The PRG did not endorse the recommendation to alter the workload allocation process by including research output in the form of published research in the process and increasing the scheduling of teaching to provide protected space for research. The PRG was of the opinion that implementing such a recommendation would create a greater divide between teaching and research, whereas all academic staff in a department should be engaged in both teaching and research. However, the PRG did support the linked recommendation that teaching responsibilities for research active staff should include tutorials.*

*Subject to budgetary constraints, the PRG endorsed the recommendation to recruit a teaching assistant and a research assistant to facilitate an improvement in the quality of tutorials and the completion of research projects.*

## **Recommendations for improvement made by BIS**

The PRG endorsed the following recommendations made by the staff of the BIS group in the Self Assessment Report (*Comments from the Peer Review Group are in italics*):

12. In line with national priorities to double the number of PhD candidates in Ireland within a 5 year timeframe. The aim of BIS is to increase the output of graduates with doctoral degrees in two key ways:

- a. Improved BIS capability to supervise doctoral research and lead high level research projects to capture funding from various sources.

*The PRG noted that this is dependent on staff, where relevant, completing their studies for a PhD qualification.*

- b. Attract high calibre candidates globally through the development of a specific PhD programme.

*The PRG noted that this includes a formal PhD programme with set completion in four year cycles which has been approved by the Academic Board of the University, and which includes both a significant taught element and a major thesis.*

13. Improve the impact of our research on industry and government by

- a. fostering closer long term partnerships with specific industrial sectors
- b. targeting specific funding sources in an organised and collaborative manner

14. Enhance the practice of teaching in BIS by

- a. sharing knowledge and resources in an organised fashion
- b. formal mentoring of new staff members for teaching and related activities

15. Continuously enhance our portfolio of programmes by:

- a. Promote greater involvement of all staff in the creation and upgrading of programmes and modules
- b. Create and support more flexible routes for postgraduate study.

- c. Provide professional development programmes

### **Recommendations made by the Peer Review Group**

The following is a summary of the additional recommendations made by the PRG.

1. The Department of AFIS should be split into two separate departments, Accounting & Finance and Business Information Systems.
2. The appointment of a Professor of Accounting should be expedited and followed by the filling of two other vacant senior positions.
3. The funding process in relation to the HEA Skills Programme money should be made much more transparent.
4. A more proactive approach should be taken by the Department to ensure that students are well informed and well prepared, particularly in First Year, for the decisions they have to take in relation to the choice of subjects, courses and to their careers.
5. The possibility of re-introducing Accounting as a major in the B.Comm Degree should be considered, as should the introduction of a Masters in Accounting, since each of these should lead to opportunities for more exemptions in the professional examinations for graduates.
6. The Department should consider if the development of tutors could be improved.
7. A more formal system of recognition of teaching quality be established at University level.
8. Reduce the student/staff ratio to ensure that the current standards in teaching and learning are maintained particularly as the research effort expands.

9. Consider whether there is a need for greater emphasis on technical foundations in the BSc in Business Information Systems to ensure that graduates are flexible and can adapt readily to new environments.
10. Put arrangements in place to assist lecturers who are in the process of completing a PhD. The arrangements should consist of a plan with a worked out time-schedule for completion of the thesis and the PhD defense.
11. Develop the relations with continental Europe and be able to apply for European research grants as well as national and international grants.
12. Establish an Industry Advisory Board for Accounting & Finance, comparable to the BIS Advisory Board.
13. Investigate the feasibility of developing a Corporate College.

**Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit**

**Department of Accounting, Finance & Information Systems**

***Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2006***

- 17.30 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group  
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.  
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.
- 19.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

***Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2006***

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 2.120 O’Rahilly Building  
Consideration of Self-Assessment Report
- 09.00 Professor Ciaran Murphy, Head of Department
- 09.30 Meeting with all members of the department
- 10.30 Tea/Coffee
- 10.45 Meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.  
The PRG divided into two groups for these meetings:
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>Group A:</u> Professor B. Hanzon (Chair),<br>Professor M. Ryan,<br>Professor JC Pomerol | <u>Group B:</u> Mr. M. Hayes (Chair),<br>Mr. D. Nestor,<br>Professor L. Murray,<br>Professor J. Samuels, |
| <u>Venue:</u> Room 2.120 O’Rahilly Building  | <u>Venue:</u> Room 3.18, O’Rahilly Building  |
- 10.45 Mr. Brian O’Flaherty
- 11.00 Dr Tom Butler
- 11.15 Ms Aine White  
Mr. Ivan Morrissey
- 11.30 Ms Ciara Heavin
- 11.45 Mr. David Sammon
- 12.0 Mr. Bob Dumigan  
Ms Karen Hannigan
- 12.15 Mr Jeremy Hayes
- 12.30 Ms Patricia Lynch
- 12.45 Dr. Pat Finnegan
- 10.45 Dr Ray Donnelly
- 11.00 Mr. John Doran
- 11.15 Mr. Mark Hutchinson
- 11.30 Ms. Máire Kavanagh;  
Ms. Felicity Lee;  
Ms. Liz O’Donoghue
- 11.45 Mr. David Humphreys
- 12.00 Dr Margaret Healy
- 12.15 Mr. Peter Cleary
- 12.30 Ms. Sandra Brosnan
- 12.45 Ms. Maeve McCutcheon
- 13.00 Mr. Eamonn Fagan
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Visit to core facilities of Department escorted by Professor C. Murphy

Meetings with representatives of students

	<u>Venue: Room 2.120 O’Rahilly Building</u>	<u>Venue: Room 3.18, O’Rahilly Building</u>
15.00	<u>Representatives of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year IS Undergraduate Students</u>	<u>Representatives of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year AF Undergraduate Students</u>
	Aonghus Sugrue ( <i>BIS I</i> ) Tom Willis ( <i>BIS I</i> ) Laura McMahon ( <i>BIS I</i> ) Clare Lane ( <i>BIS I</i> ) Julia Ann Corkery ( <i>BIS II</i> ) Marie Arnold ( <i>BIS II</i> ) Colm Daly ( <i>BIS II</i> ) Muiris Lenihan ( <i>BIS II</i> )	Fintan Neville ( <i>BSc Acc I</i> ) Niamh Fleming ( <i>BSc Fin I</i> ) Phillip Weedle ( <i>BSc Fin Maths I</i> ) Ronan Gilmartin ( <i>BSc Acc II</i> ) Orna O’Keeffe ( <i>BSc Fin II</i> ) Eoin Joyce ( <i>Bcomm II</i> )
15.30	<u>Representatives of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Year IS Undergraduate Students</u>	<u>Representatives of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Year AF Undergraduate Students</u>
	Shane Ahern ( <i>BIS III</i> ) Alan Fogarty ( <i>BIS III</i> ) Aine O’Dwyer ( <i>BIS III</i> ) Dervilia Ni Chonchubhair ( <i>BIS III</i> ) Clive Donovan ( <i>BIS IV</i> ) Karen Hoey ( <i>BIS IV</i> ) Darragh O’Keeffe ( <i>BIS IV</i> )	Shane Hayes ( <i>BSc Acc III</i> ) Jane O’Leary ( <i>BSc Acc III</i> ) Lorraine Walsh ( <i>BComm III</i> ) Conor Harnett ( <i>BSc Fin III</i> ) David McNally ( <i>BSc Fin IV</i> ) Conor Daly ( <i>BSc Fin IV</i> ) Fiona Keogh ( <i>BSc Fin IV</i> )
16.00	<u>Representatives of H. Dip., Masters and PhD IS Postgraduate Students</u>	<u>Representatives of H. Dip., Masters and PhD AF Postgraduate Students</u>
	David Kelly ( <i>Ph.D.</i> ) Brian Murphy ( <i>MSc</i> ) Darren Hayes ( <i>MBS EBC</i> ) Joanne Farrell ( <i>MBS MIMAS</i> ) Paul Twomey ( <i>MBS BIS</i> ) Daire Fitzgerald ( <i>MBS BIS</i> ) Neil Ferriss ( <i>H.Dip</i> )	Tongyu Cao ( <i>PhD</i> ) Michelle Scott ( <i>MBS Corporate Fin &amp; Acc</i> ) Min Ming Song ( <i>MBS Corporate Fin &amp; Acc</i> ) Paul Kirwan ( <i>MBS Man Info &amp; Man Acc Systems I</i> ) Deirdre Looney ( <i>MBS Man Info &amp; Man Acc Systems II</i> ) Louise Hodnett ( <i>HDip in Corporate Fin &amp; Acc</i> ) Amanda Burke ( <i>HDip in Corporate Fin &amp; Acc</i> ) Daniel Moore ( <i>HDip in Business &amp; Financial Info Systems</i> )
16.30	Mr Pat O’Connor Head of ICT Skills Higher Education Authority, via conference call	Mr. Niall O’Sullivan, Programme Director, BSc Finance
16.45	Time for consideration of issues by PRG	
17.00	Conference Call with Mr. JB McCarthy, EMC, USA	
17.15	<u>Representatives of recent graduates and employers</u>	
	Ms. Susan Burke, <i>Graduate (BSc Finance 2005)</i> Mr. Jack Crowley, <i>Employer</i> Mr. Vincent Goggin, <i>Graduate (BSc Accounting 2004)</i> Mr Allan Grainger, <i>Musgrave Supervalve Centra</i>	

Ms. Gael Hardie-Brown, *Graduate, Former staff member & Employer*  
Mr Graham Healy, *Accenture*  
Mr. John Higgins, *Employer*  
Ms. Kate Hyde, *Pepsi*  
Dr David Murray, *FMC*  
Ms. Siobhan O'Regan, *Employer*  
Mr Sean O'Sullivan, *Seabrook Research*  
Ms. Aileen Waterman, *Placement Officer for Commerce Faculty, UCC*

- 19.00 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.

***Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006***

- 08.25 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 2.120 O'Rahilly Building
- 08.30 Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
- 09.00 Professor Caroline Fennell, Acting Head, College of Business & Law
- 09.30 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Rosarii Buttimer, Subject Librarian
- 10.45 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office
- 11.10 Mr. Diarmuid Collins, Bursar
- 11.30 Professor Peter Kennedy, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- 12.00 Consideration of Issues by PRG
- 12.30 Professor Neil Collins, Dean, Faculty of Commerce
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 16.00 Professor Ciaran Murphy, Head of Department
- 17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Department by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.
- 19.00 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.