

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**B.Comm. (European) Degree Programme**

**Academic Year 2005/06**

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Members of the Peer Review Group (PRG)**

Professor Julia Kennedy, School of Pharmacy, UCC (Chair)

Dr. Francis Douglas, Director of Early Childhood Studies, UCC

Professor Bill Richardson, Department of Spanish, NUI Galway

Professor John Gaffney, School of Languages and Social Sciences, Aston University, UK

Ms. Anne Serreau, School of Business, Southampton Solent University, UK

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

The timetable for the site visit is attached as Appendix A.

The reviewers found the timetable to be adequate and suitable for the purposes of the review.

## **PEER REVIEW**

The PRG were aware of the introduction of new academic structures in the University, and noted that the references in this Report to the role of 'Dean' and of the 'Faculty of Commerce' may need to be re-interpreted in the context of the new University structures.

### **Methodology**

The reviewers acted as a team throughout the site visit. All members of the PRG participated in all discussions and visits to facilities, etc. The reviewers visited the Library, the Language Laboratory, and offices in the O'Rahilly Building. Details are supplied in Appendix A. The external reviewers took particular responsibility for leading discussions with respect to the disciplines of the languages and business.

The PRG report was drafted during the afternoon and evening of the second day and was finalised subsequently by email communications. All reviewers agreed to the report.

## OVERALL ANALYSIS

### Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The PRG expressed their thanks for the documentation provided, which the Group found to be very readable and comprehensive. The SAR provided the PRG with detailed information, a good analysis and, in addition, the Board of Studies had made a significant number of recommendations for improvement which the Group found to be a good starting point to begin their deliberations.

The PRG considered that the B.Comm (European) Degree has significant potential, and were impressed particularly by the attitude of the representatives of employers and other external stakeholders who met with the reviewers. The external stakeholders were very positive about their experiences with the graduates and, in their view, the many good qualities of the Degree. One of the major strengths of the Degree was recognised by the PRG as being the bringing together of the disciplines of both business and languages, and this view was reinforced by employers who met with the reviewers.

The PRG considered that this Degree reflects a boldness and courage in its development. The programme consists of a number of elements to be commended, in particular the Third Year which is spent abroad, usually studying at a partner institution in a country of the language specialism of the students. The PRG noted that the Degree has now been in place for seven years and identified a key question for the Board of Studies as being '*what is the future for the Degree?*' This led on to the question: *How is the product defined?* These are questions for the Board of Studies to consider and answer.

The PRG noted that the Board of Studies for the Degree Programme consists of enthusiastic staff, who, in general, are not Heads of Departments. Concern was noted at the relatively junior grades of the majority of the staff involved as members of the Board of Studies. This has led to a lack of perceived power and authority of the Board of Studies and to constraints on the further development of the curriculum for the Programme.

One of the key reasons for modularisation within UCC was to allow the flexibility in the future of the development of different types of courses to suit different types of need on the part of learners, both traditional and non-traditional. The PRG were of the opinion that this Degree is a pioneering interdisciplinary programme, and hence charts the way for the Faculty and the University. The reviewers noted that one of the chief difficulties for this Programme is the lack of a senior academic, for example a 'Dean' or 'Professor', to promote the undergraduate Degree Programme and related research at the highest levels in the University. The reviewers also noted that this lack of a senior academic to lead this type of programme is not unique to this Degree and that there are other interdisciplinary Degree Programmes offered in UCC which are organised by a number of Departments and which span more than one College within the University, and which similarly lack an academic leader at a very senior level.

### **SWOT Analysis**

The PRG noted, and largely endorsed, the findings of the SWOT analysis and commended the process by which the SWOT analysis was carried out, noting in particular the efforts to engage all staff with responsibility for teaching and supporting the Programme in the process. The PRG noted the following issues identified in the SWOT analysis as key to the Programme:

- The problems with timetabling and scheduling of activities;
- The lack of a physical base/dedicated administration support for the Programme;
- The lack of resources dedicated to the Programme;
- Student perceptions and expectations;
- Lack of executive power of the Director;
- Lack of a succession strategy for replacement of the Director.

The PRG also noted the need for integration of the organisation of the Programme and its curriculum, for dialogue between the staff of the Departments responsible for delivery of the Programme, and for the positive marketing of the Programme to potential students.

### **Benchmarking**

The PRG commended the efforts of the Board of Studies to undertake a meaningful and worthwhile benchmarking exercise. The Group noted that the visit to the European School of Business in Reutlingen, Germany, which is part of a Fachhochschule, resulted in four key suggestions for improvement, which would be of benefit to the B.Comm (European) Degree in UCC, as follows:

1. Strengthening of links between partner universities;
2. Strengthening of the integration of the student body whereby students are involved in decisions concerning the Degree;
3. Strengthening of the ties with business;
4. Introduction of dual awards as a marker of competitive advantage for the Degree, which would require the granting of a Diploma on the basis of achievements of the Year Abroad.

The PRG agreed with points 1, 2 and 3 but expressed reservations about the possibilities for implementation of point 4 in the shorter term.

With respect to the second benchmarking visit undertaken to the ESSEC Business School in Paris, part of the French Grande École system, the PRG noted the following:

- ESSEC's programmes are significantly better resourced than the B.Comm (European) Degree.
- ESSEC's experience shows that international business education, including the combination of business studies and languages, is a growing market.
- ESSEC has a strong programmatic, as distinct from a departmental basis.
- ESSEC has very strong links with the business world. Business work placements are the norm for their students.
- ESSEC makes extensive use of business practitioners as adjunct professors. This broadens the range of teaching to which students are exposed, and strengthens the ties between academics and business.
- ESSEC places a strong emphasis on support for students at partner universities and on work placement, and for visiting students at ESSEC.
- ESSEC has a very well developed "buddy" system.
- ESSEC has a highly successful Masters programme

The PRG commended the elements of good practice identified by the Board of Studies as outcomes of the benchmarking exercise and have incorporated many of these objectives in the recommendations for improvement discussed later in this Report.

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

### **Programme Details**

The B.Comm (European) Degree is an interdisciplinary Degree in business and language and culture offered by staff from a total of eleven academic Departments. Staff, students and employers communicated a range of very different perceptions on the nature of the Degree and the rationale behind the curriculum. Some staff seemed to be of the opinion that the B.Comm (European) Degree is mainly a language Degree whereas all others, including the students, perceived it principally as a business Degree with an element of language and of culture. The title of the Programme suggests a high degree of integration, but the PRG believed that this is not reflected to any significant extent in the current situation of the Degree. Each Department involved in delivery of the Programme appeared to be working in isolation and in many cases communication on a regular basis between Departments at both staff and student level was lacking.

The PRG noted that the Degree was established in 1998 and were of the opinion that an extensive review of the rationale and curriculum for the Degree Programme is timely. The Programme has gone through a number of cycles since its establishment and it is appropriate to take stock of its curriculum and revise it, following this quality review.

Following on the discussions with all the various groups of stakeholders, the PRG considered that issues such as the international dimension, business language, the question of cultural diversity, etc. must all be included as central components of the Programme. The PRG recommended that it be decided as to what the primary focus of the Degree is – whether it is an integrated Degree or it is a combined Degree. For maximum market value, the PRG recommended that it be an integrated Degree, and structures and curriculum design and content should be put in place to achieve this.

The basic rationale underlying the Degree Programme must be considered by the Board of Studies and agreed prior to consideration, review and updating of the curriculum.

There are three possible models for such a Degree:

1. a Degree whereby half the course consists of business subjects and half of language and culture;
2. a Degree whereby less than half of the course consists of business subjects and the remainder consists of language and culture;
3. a Degree where more than half the course consists of business subjects and the remainder of language and culture.

The decision on which model is to be adopted by the Board of Studies will determine the rationale for the Degree that is offered by UCC.

The PRG considered that an expansion of the range and diversity of languages that are offered would enhance the Programme and increase its attractiveness to potential students and employers. New languages that might be offered include Chinese and Arabic. Currently, the modules offered by the language Departments of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences are designed not only to teach the language to the learners, but also the background culture underpinning that language. The PRG understood that, in some instances, modules offered to achieve these aims generally reflect the lecturers' particular research areas and interests. These research areas and interests are used as a vehicle to impart particular concepts and skills to the students. It was clear to the PRG that the students of all the languages almost uniformly failed to understand this reasoning behind the particular modules and focused only on content, which they found largely irrelevant to modern business environments. This raises the question of whether the course content is inappropriate or else communication with students is lacking.

The PRG also considered that the possibility of allowing students to study in two languages should be entertained. Hence, as a part of the curriculum review recommended above, the PRG suggested that the possibility of the introduction of

other languages or a Programme with dual language should be considered seriously by the Board of Studies.

The PRG noted that the curriculum for the Degree is delivered in modular format, with individual modules being delivered by different academic Departments according to a credit-based system, wherein each Department is assigned a quota for the number of modules to be delivered. The PRG felt that this restricts possibilities for development and enhancement of the curriculum. Consideration should be given to development of integrated modules whereby languages and the business departments jointly teach within individual modules.

It is true that some of the language Departments have recognised the need for a greater number of business-type language modules but the timing and placement in the Programme of these modules needs to be examined. There was a clear sense among the students – and the PRG - of a lack of preparation for the courses taken in partner universities and institutions during the Year Abroad, to the point where there is sometimes little benefit from the content of the modules studied because of the lack of basic business terminology in some languages. If the students had a deeper experience of business language prior to the Year Abroad it is likely they would derive significantly greater benefit from their experience in Third Year. The PRG recommended that business-oriented modules should be incorporated into each of the language streams in each year where this is not already the case and that the Board of Studies should encourage the Departments to more actively explore the possibility of dedicated modules for the B.Comm (European) Programme. The PRG did note that the provision of dedicated modules would need to be done on a financially viable basis, and suggested that perhaps the new modules could be made available as electives to other programmes to assist in this.

The PRG noted that the curriculum has many modules providing an introduction to many aspects of business. The Degree appears to lack a deepening engagement with disciplines and this should be reviewed with the aim of enabling the students to develop a deeper understanding. In the business aspects of the curriculum, the PRG recommended that introductory courses should be confined to First and Second Year with a progression to more advanced courses in the following years.



In meetings and discussions with external stakeholders, the suggestion was made that perhaps the Board of Studies should consider the introduction of contemporary modules for this region, including modules on food marketing, IT and pharmaceuticals. The PRG felt that this was an appropriate and valuable suggestion and recommended that the Board of Studies actively considers these suggestions during its review of the Programme.

The PRG noted that there are certain universities where it is possible for students to have access to specialised business modules which can lead to specialised modules in Final Year. The PRG recommended that the content of the Year Abroad should become the Third Year of the Degree with respect to the business subjects studied and UCC should recognise this achievement and allow the students to build on their achievements in Fourth Year.

In addition, the PRG noted that at present only the B.Comm (European (Irish)) Degree provides opportunity for a student to choose between a placement in industry and a university placement (in the University of Aberdeen). This arrangement is a very different one from the rest of the language streams and the PRG recommended that the Board of Studies could build on this in providing choice for students.

In summary:

The PRG recommended that the Board of Studies defines the Degree, articulates its nature, and makes proposals to the Faculty/College/University as to how the curriculum of the Degree should be amended and improved. This review should include, *inter alia*,

- consideration of the possibility of introducing the study of a second language into the Programme;
- consideration of the introduction of business-oriented modules into each of the language streams in each year where this is not already the case;
- consideration of expansion of the range of languages offered on the Programme;
- consideration of the possibility of the introduction of integrated modules taught jointly by staff in the various contributing departments;

- consideration of development of streams in the business courses which would allow the students to acquire a deeper understanding of specific elements;
- consideration of the introduction of contemporary business modules relevant to business in the local region.

### **Programme Organisation & Planning**

The present organisation of the Degree Programme is that it is managed by the Board of Studies. This is a large group of staff representative of the different disciplines and academic Departments who contribute courses and modules to the Degree Programme. A key difficulty arises in the consideration of curriculum change and in management of the integration of the Degree Programme in that, in the present structure, all Departments and teaching staff have to agree to everything before change can be introduced. The PRG recognised that curriculum redefinition is problematic in any institution and is particularly so in a situation where so many academic departments are responsible for delivery of a Programme. The PRG suggested the appointment of a subgroup of the Board of Studies with responsibility for coordination of curriculum review of the entire Programme. This subgroup would be tasked with responsibility to bring forward proposals for curriculum reform and change, and would also follow-up on the implementation of such proposals, if approved.

The PRG recommended that the Board of Studies establish a Management Group, chaired by the Director of the Degree Programme and consisting of no more than seven members in total, including a representative of the Library, who liaises with the Heads of contributing departments. Rotation of members of the Management Group may be a useful mechanism in this respect and would help to share the workload. The PRG recommended that the Management Group should meet on a weekly/fortnightly basis during term time to manage the Degree.

The PRG noted that the current holder of the post of Director of the B.Comm (European) Degree is due to retire the week following the review visit. The PRG considered that this is an opportune time for the University and the Faculty of Commerce to consider the replacement of the Director by a professorial appointment

to ensure the continuity, status and succession of the Programme. The advantages of such a strategic approach are discussed later in this Report.

The inclusion of study at partner international universities and institutions was seen by the PRG to be a major advantage and enhancement of the Degree Programme and was highly commended by the PRG. In discussions with stakeholders and drawing on the experiences of the external members of the review team and the outcomes of the benchmarking exercises, the PRG concluded that not only should the issue of adequate preparation for the Year Abroad be reviewed and improved but also that the possibility of introducing into the Year Abroad a work placement element that might consist of 3/6/9 months duration should be seriously considered by the Board of Studies and the Faculty. The PRG suggested that it might be appropriate to consider applying the same methodology as is applied in the B.Comm (European (Irish)) Degree to all the other language streams.

The PRG noted that in other similar institutions it is possible to combine a university placement and a work placement during the Year Abroad.

The PRG strongly recommended that introduction of a combination of a university placement and a work placement be considered for all students within the programme during Third Year.

The PRG recognised that resourcing of the Degree is an issue. This is not unique to this interdisciplinary Programme and is almost inevitable with the current funding model in operation in the University. Presently, departments are funded for all their activities. It is not possible in the current funding model in UCC to separate out the funding that is attributable to degree programmes or the contribution that each programme is making to individual activities of the departments. Interdisciplinary programmes do not generally get resourced independently of academic departments, although the PRG did note some exceptions to this norm. The PRG was very strongly of the opinion that major interdisciplinary programmes should be adequately resourced as appropriate so as to cover not only the teaching elements in Cork but including the monitoring of the students while abroad and to enable regular visits to students abroad.

The PRG recommended that the new funding model about to be introduced in UCC in October 2006 takes into account the requirements of interdisciplinary degree programmes, including in particular the B.Comm (European) Degree programme.

The PRG noted the effectiveness of the 'Buddy system' as it works abroad and recommends that reciprocal arrangements be put in place for students who come to UCC.

The PRG noted that at present there are significant difficulties with timetabling. The PRG were strongly of the opinion that the nature and curriculum of the B.Comm (European) Degree Programme should **not** be determined by the existing timetables of the business and language disciplines respectively. Enhancing the level of student choice of modules within the timetable could prove to be advantageous to the Degree. The need to advise and mentor students with respect to the consequences of their choices was also stressed by the PRG. The lack of a student handbook where all relevant information on module choices, assessments, bibliographies, academic preparation for the Year Abroad, etc. was also identified by students as presenting them with some difficulties. The PRG noted and commended the comprehensive handbook produced by the International Education Office detailing the practicalities students need to be aware of in preparation for and during their year abroad.

The PRG strongly recommended that a handbook for B.Comm (European) Degree programme be developed, which would include all options, modules, course descriptions, reading lists, forms of assessment, etc.

The appointment of placement officer(s) to ensure the integrity of the Year Abroad and the studies undertaken during that Year and to coordinate all activities of the Third Year was also seen as being essential to the on-going quality of the Programme and the student experience. The PRG considered that the appointment of two placement officers, with academic qualifications, to oversee the placement activities would greatly enhance, and indeed is necessary for, the efficient and high quality management of the Third Year activities. One of these appointments might be in business and one in languages. Such appointees would facilitate the preparation and

placement of students, would monitor the study programme of the students while abroad and would conduct regular visits to partner institutions. When such appointments are made there would be a need for close liaison with the academic staff of UCC responsible for the Programme, the academic staff of the partner institutions and the staff of the International Education Office. Administrative support (at least one Senior Executive Assistant) should underpin these placements and all should be made simultaneously. The appointment of this cohort of people, along with a Director of the Programme, the PRG believed, would give a focal point for the Degree.

The PRG recommended the appointment of two Placement Officers to manage and coordinate the Third Year of the Degree Programme.

The PRG recommended the appointment of a Senior Executive Assistant to support the Placement Officers in the management and coordination of the Third Year of the Degree Programme.

### **Teaching & Learning**

The PRG heard from the students that they feel they are lacking in oral and aural skills and the PRG recommended that every effort is made to increase support for further development of these skills. In particular, there would appear to be very little time in lectures devoted to formal spoken language skills. The PRG noted that there are other ways of developing opportunities for students and encouraging them to develop autonomous learning.

The PRG noted the lack of technical support for language learning. For a degree of this nature, the reviewers were of the opinion that the support provided by the language Departments in this area is seriously inadequate. It would appear that this type of support for languages overall is deficient yet it is crucial that students of this Degree attain a high proficiency in oral, aural and written language, especially in current affairs and business terminology. This is difficult for the students to achieve at present because of lack of multimedia facilities. The PRG were strongly of the view that a centre should be established where facilities such as satellite television on which students can watch the daily news in the different languages and hard copies of major international newspapers and magazines are all made available. The

availability and use of an adequately resourced language centre, which encourages and supports students in the development of their own learning, is one way forward. The PRG considered that, to facilitate this approach, the arrangements for the existing Language Centre, the current status of which was unclear to the reviewers, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The existence and indeed development of such a Centre is essential to the sustainability of the B.Comm (European) Degree and other degrees involving acquisition of high levels of language skills.

With respect to assessment methodologies in use in the programme, the PRG noted that, with one exception, the business subjects were heavily dependent on end-of-year examinations. Students expressed serious concerns about the lack of variety and diversity in the assessment methods currently employed. The PRG were made aware that this is, to some extent, the result of the high number of “*introductory*” courses taken by students of the B.Comm (European) Degree in the First and Second Years of the Programme. This may be further compounded by students’ choice of modules in the Third Year.

The PRG recommended that in all business modules there should be a progression in depth and analysis from First Year onwards and that it is not satisfactory to have “*introductory*” type modules in the Second and Fourth Years. The PRG recommended that this progression should be continued in the Third Year Abroad (provided that the modules studied are carefully chosen). The inclusion of modules at Second, Third and Fourth Year levels, which build on and progress in-depth knowledge of the disciplines would automatically result in a wider variety in the types of assessment being used. Thus, in the business modules, greater use could be made of projects and group work, for example. This was also what the students requested.

With respect to student communication, the PRG was aware of the excellent use being made of “*Blackboard*” for notes and messages and suggested that this be extended to all modules on the course. The identity of the Degree would be greatly strengthened by providing a dedicated office staffed by a Senior Executive Assistant. This office would act as a focal point for the course and provide a place for a notice board. Also with regard to identity, the PRG noted with concern the lack of a dedicated external examiner for this Programme, which is not in line with the guidelines approved by

Academic Council for interdisciplinary degree programmes. The PRG recommended the appointment of a dedicated external examiner for the B.Comm (European) Degree Programme with immediate effect (for the Examinations in the 2006/7 academic teaching year).

In addition, it should be noted that Academic Council requires all modules to be assessed by students each academic year. The PRG found that with some modules in the B.Comm (European) Degree this was not the case in practice. Feedback from student questionnaires or other forms of evaluation by students should inform subsequent refinements to modules and the organisation of the Degree as part of the ongoing quality assurance of the Degree by the Board of Studies/Management Group. The PRG also noted that there is a higher failure rate in First Year than in subsequent years of the Programme. The question must be posed as to why this is so and answers arrived at so that the necessary steps can be taken to improve the retention and progression rates from First Year into subsequent years.

Whilst the PRG understood the desire for staff of the language disciplines to teach in their own areas of research and specialism, this approach appears to be a major hindrance to the development and indeed the possible survival of this Degree. The PRG observed that recruitment to some of the language disciplines is at a very low level and that diversification of teaching programmes and methodologies must be engaged in if some of these disciplines are to survive as entities within UCC. The Department of German has provided an example of a possible way forward and has moved to some extent in this direction by linking language to business aspects in a module recently developed. The PRG did not advocate completely altering the approach to including aspects of literature in the curriculum delivered by the language disciplines, but the reality of the requirements of a modern 'business with language' programme must be appreciated and change made to the curriculum to reflect this. The PRG recommended that a major rethink of what is taught, based on student needs and market demands, is overdue for the Programme and in particular for the language and cultural aspects of the curriculum. Currently there appears to be a mismatch between the expectations of the students and employers and the objectives and delivery of the current curriculum.

The PRG noted that the Third Year of the Degree (“the Year Abroad”) was a major attraction and selling point, from the staff, student and employer perspectives. It was apparent to the PRG that this Third Year took place against a fairly uncontrolled environment, with students having great flexibility in their choice of subjects pursued whilst in their foreign university. Some students described a wide-ranging choice of subjects studied, and others, whilst not officially on work placement, were actually working. Some (i.e. the Irish students in Ireland) were actually on work placement.

The PRG was in receipt of the learning agreement *pro forma* already in place in the Degree Programme that students are required to submit before leaving for the period of study abroad. The PRG considered and discussed with individual staff members how these learning agreements are assessed and agreed upon, and were of the opinion that there would appear to be lacking a formal process, through the Board of Studies, where these agreements are monitored, administered, changes made, approved and the overall quality of the Third Year assured. Such a process should be instituted without delay.

The PRG recommended that the Management Group of the Board of Studies monitor and ensure that appropriate learning agreements are in place for all students in Third Year.

The PRG recommended that the current Board of Studies or the Management Group, if established as recommended, articulate the aim of the Year Abroad in more definitive terms and outcomes it is seeking to achieve. Whilst this Year Abroad undoubtedly gives students maturity and independence, this could be achieved in the same manner outside of a University programme. The fact that this occurs within the course of a University Degree should not deflect from that year being structured, rigorous and academically challenging, and being an integral and coherent part of the total Degree. Thus the Third Year modules taken by the students should have a contiguous relationship with modules in Second and Fourth Year. Whilst placements are extremely valuable, the PRG recommended that where these are undertaken by students, they should be complemented with at least one semester of university study. The PRG was of the view that the ideal scenario for the structure of the Year Abroad



would be one where the students spend one semester in a university abroad and one in the workplace.

The PRG recommended that the Board of Studies re-consider the structure and activities of the Year Abroad with a view to putting in place a combination of work placement and study abroad.

The PRG noted the lack of consistency from the partner universities abroad both in their methods of reporting and in the results achieved by the students in modules undertaken in the Year Abroad. Whilst the PRG considered it highly desirable that marks from the penultimate year of study in the Degree Programme be included in the computation of the final marks & standards for the award of the Degree, the PRG also recognised that the aforementioned difficulties may nevertheless preclude this at this point in time.

The PRG met with representatives of students, some of whom expressed dissatisfaction at being unable to take a “true” major in Fourth Year, and attributed this partly due to the nature of the preceding three years’ modules and partly to the timetabling of modules on offer in the Fourth Year. Some expressed the view that the timetabling for the B.Comm (European) Degree in the Fourth Year was hostage to the timetabling arrangements of the B.Comm Degree and this perception was not restricted to the Fourth Year. Students also expressed dissatisfaction with the overall seemingly inflexible portfolio of modules offered, especially in the language disciplines and commented on the limitations that this appears to place on the coherence and integration of the Degree. The PRG recommended the appointment of a Professor in a discipline of relevance to this area, e.g. international business, international marketing, languages for business, intercultural communication, international business environment, and with the remit to develop relevant taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level and related research activity, and to provide academic leadership and vision. This person could be sited either in the commerce area or in the languages.

### **Research & Scholarly Activity**

The PRG considered that there are opportunities to develop postgraduate programmes

of study arising from the B.Comm (European) Degree. There is a real potential for this multidisciplinary cross-Faculty degree to act as a seedbed for taught postgraduate programmes, which in turn could lead ultimately to research degrees. A relatively small amount of money could also fund PhD studentships, which would assist in building the research activity in the area, in line with UCC's declared intention of having 30% of the student complement at fourth level by 2010.

To help achieve this aspiration, the PRG recommended that the Faculty of Commerce should consider the appointment of a Professor in a discipline of relevance to this area. This appointment should be open to all disciplines involved in the degree. The Professor would have a primary role in the encouragement of interdisciplinary cross-Faculty research.

The PRG recommended that consideration be given to creating a position, at an appropriately senior level, aimed at ensuring the promotion and coordination of interdisciplinary studies across the University. He/she would promote all interdisciplinary courses and cross-UCC programmes, and liaise with the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support with respect to the promotion of interdisciplinary research, including across the four Colleges and the Faculties.

### **Staff Development**

The PRG noted that in the business subjects there is significant room for more development in this area in terms of staff acquiring PhD qualifications. Unless staff themselves have a PhD there is no possibility of their being able to recruit further PhD students from the Programme and they are thus unlikely to achieve the 30% of postgraduates students which is UCC's declared objective.

There is potential for the Board of Studies to devise proposals for staff development (and innovation in curriculum content) and it is the view of the PRG that such proposals would be favourably received by the University.

Innovative approaches made by the Board of Studies could act as a focus for proposals in relation to staff development.

## **External Relations**

In meetings with all stakeholders, but particularly with representatives of external stakeholders such as employers and recent graduates, it became clear that the addition of an external perspective would significantly enhance the quality of the design of the curriculum and its focus. This is particularly relevant in a Degree focussed on the business disciplines, and involvement of external stakeholders will help ensure the continuing relevance of the Degree to the local, national and international community. Addition of this perspective from outside would allow *inter alia* consideration of best practice in other institutions.

The PRG recommended that an Advisory Board should be established with prestigious external stakeholders in both the regional and international scenes who would meet at least twice per year and make recommendations to the Board of Studies.

## **Support Services**

It was apparent to the PRG that the liaison and communication with the relevant staff of the Library should be improved and enhanced. The Library has significant resources which can be made available to the academic community and the students. The PRG recommended the appointment of a subject librarian dedicated to business and commerce, currently vacant, should be filled; and that particular attention should be paid here to international context and linguistic and cultural context.

The Management Group should co-opt the subject librarian who would thus be in weekly contact with the Programme during term time. The subject librarian would be able to advise on available library resources including library courses, IT, audiovisual aids etc. The PRG recommended that the Management Group, when established, should consider innovative ways to increase the Library resources available, for example by making application for specialist library grants.

The PRG noted that the International Education Office provides good support for students going abroad for a year as well as for international students coming to study in UCC for a period. The PRG felt that this should be recognised as being a valuable support to the Programme.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, the PRG found that past graduates of this Programme were confident and employers were complimentary. The Degree is now in place for seven years and, in the view of the reviewers, is not sustainable in the longer term in its present form. However, the PRG considered that with some innovative changes to the Programme, possibly involving some difficult decisions, the Degree has the potential to become very successful, an asset to UCC and attractive to the local, national and international communities. The PRG found that the B.Comm (European) Degree could provide excellent opportunities for expansion and development, in a meaningful way, of the language disciplines and departments in UCC and would deliver a much more relevant B.Comm Degree than the original B.Comm Degree. For the Degree to flourish, the reviewers are of the opinion that additional language options, such as Chinese and Arabic, should be integrated into the curriculum. It is envisaged that cultures such as these are likely to be at the heart of Ireland's future business endeavours. The Degree will also need a major re-evaluation of the business components in order to equip the students with the most up-to-date business skills and knowledge. It also needs investment of resources, especially in administrative support, physical space, library and multimedia facilities and reorientation of personnel. If there is not improved communication between the various departments, Faculties and Colleges involved to promote a shared vision/mission for this Degree, then this Programme is in danger of foundering. To achieve this extensive remit across the current Faculties and Colleges involved, and indeed innovate the Programme with other College involvement and secure research funding at postgraduate level, an appointment at an appropriately senior level with responsibility for Interdisciplinary Studies is needed to be an advocate and a driver.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

### **Recommendations for improvement made by the Board of Studies**

The PRG noted the significant number of recommendations made in the SAR and considered all of these very carefully. The recommendations for improvement made in the SAR by the Board of Studies that are endorsed by the PRG are incorporated into the recommendations for improvement made by the PRG.

## **Recommendations for improvement made by the PRG**

The PRG recommends:

1. That, as a key priority, the Board of Studies defines the Degree, articulates its nature, and makes proposals to the Faculty/College/University as to how the curriculum of the Degree should be amended and improved. This review should include, *inter alia*,
  - consideration of the possibility of introducing the study of a second language into the Programme;
  - consideration of the introduction of business-oriented modules into each year of the language streams where this is not already the case;
  - consideration of expansion of the range of languages offered on the Programme;
  - consideration of the possibility of the introduction of integrated modules taught jointly by staff in the various contributing Departments;
  - consideration of development of streams in the business courses which would allow the students to acquire a deeper understanding of specific elements;
  - consideration of the introduction of contemporary business modules relevant to business in the local region, as well as the national and international contexts.
  
2. That a B.Comm (European) Degree external examiner, with expertise in European business and management, be appointed.
  
3. That the post of Director for the B.Comm (European) Programme be established on a stronger institutional and financial basis, ideally by appointing a senior academic at professorial level with a fully funded position to act as Director, with financial subvention for the post from revenue generated by the Programme and to take responsibility for leading the drive to increase postgraduate programmes arising from the B.Comm (European) Degree.
  
4. That a student handbook for B.Comm (European) Degree Programme be developed, which would include all options, modules, course descriptions, reading lists, forms of assessment, etc.

5. That the introduction of a combination of a university placement and a work placement be considered for all students within the Programme during Third Year.
6. That UCC academic staff should make more frequent, ideally annual, visits to the partner universities; staff from partner universities should be encouraged to make reciprocal visits. The PRG recommended that a minimum of one visit per year by the Placement Officer should be made to each partner institution and that adequate resources be provided to enable this to happen.
7. That a 'buddy' system be developed to help prepare students before they go abroad and to support visiting students at UCC.
8. That a B.Comm (European) Business Advisory Board be established to provide a forum for promoting the B.Comm (European) Degree, allowing business and other external stakeholder input into the Programme's development.
9. That a much wider use of visiting/adjunct lecturers from the partner universities and the business community as lecturers on the Programme be made, once the revised Programme is established.
10. That the Faculty of Commerce agrees terms of reference for the Board of Studies which would include issues such as length of service on such Boards, in order to ensure both continuity and turnover in terms of Board membership.
11. That the Board of Studies establish a Management Group, which would meet on a weekly basis during teaching periods and would take responsibility for the management and coordination of the Programme and of curriculum review.
12. That a dedicated administrative post be put in place to support the B.Comm (European) Degree Programme, funded from the income generated by the Programme; dedicated office space should be provided for the Programme Director and proposed Programme Administrator to act as a focal point for the Programme for staff and students.

13. That the Board of Studies should take responsibility for staff development in relationship to the needs of the B.Comm (European) Degree.
14. That the Resource Allocation Model planned for introduction in UCC in October 2006 should include a significant programme basis, in order to ensure that all interdisciplinary programmes, as well as departments, are properly resourced.
15. That the Professor/Director should have direct access to and responsibility for dedicated resources, subject to policies determined by the Board of Studies.
16. That active consideration be given to the creation of lectureship post(s) in appropriate interdisciplinary areas (e.g. business culture) so as to integrate the different areas of study in the Programme more effectively and to provide it with a distinctive focus.
17. That a part-time teaching allocation should be established for the B.Comm (European) Degree so as to encourage and support initiatives to strengthen the comparative European dimension in teaching and learning in this Degree.
18. That the relationship between the Board of Studies and the relevant Subject Librarian(s) should be formalised in order to enhance awareness of the needs of the students in the Programme and to consider options for improving the current situation.
19. That the options of offering (i) diplomas from the partner university in recognition of the year students spend abroad and (ii) double degrees with partner universities be explored.
20. That the Board of Studies explore the possibility of establishing a European/International Masters Programme, perhaps building on academic expertise from the Programme's partner universities where such programmes are developing strongly.

21. That the possibility of creating a B.Comm (European) Centre should be explored.
22. That the Board of Studies together with the language departments explore the possibilities for obtaining support from the relevant embassies/foreign ministries for the appointment of teaching assistants with business expertise.
23. That consideration be given to creating a senior position, at an appropriately senior level, aimed at ensuring the promotion and coordination of interdisciplinary studies across the University.

### **Conclusion**

The PRG would like to thank the staff of the B.Comm (European) Degree Programme for their cooperation and openness during this review. The PRG hopes that this review and the comments and recommendations made will be of benefit and assistance to the Board of Studies in developing the Programme and the University in planning the way forward.

The PRG expressed their gratitude to the staff of the Quality Promotion Unit for their facilitation of the review and the excellent organisation of all aspects of the review visit.



**Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit**

**B.Comm. (European) Degree**

***Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 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, Director of Board of Studies and Co-ordinating Committee.

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

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Tower Room 2, North Wing, Main Quadrangle

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

- 09.00 Professor Deirdre Hunt, Director of Board of Studies

- 09.30 Meeting with members of the Board of Studies in ORB 132

Mr. Daniel Blackshields, Department of Economics  
Dr. Mark Chu, Department of Italian  
Dr. Andrew Cottey, Department of Government  
Ms. Fiona Crowley, Faculty of Commerce  
Dr. Pat Enright, Department of Food Business & Development  
Professor Deirdre Hunt, Department of Management & Marketing  
Ms. Margaret Mannix, Faculty of Commerce  
Ms. Siobhan Mortell, Department of German  
Professor David Mackenzie, Department of Hispanic Studies  
Mr. Colman Quain, Faculty of Commerce  
Dr. Pádraigín Riggs, Department of Modern Irish

- 10.45 Meetings with individual members of staff

10.45 Dr. Andrew Cottey, Chair, Co-ordinating Committee  
11.00 Mr. John Doran, Department of Accounting  
11.15 Dr. Donal Hurley, Department of Maths  
11.30 Dr. Pádraigín Riggs, Department of Irish  
11.45 Ms Siobhan Mortell, Department of German  
12.00 Mr. Daniel Blackshields, Department of Economics  
12.15 Ms. Veronique Grabe, Department of French  
12.30 Ms. Mary McCarthy, Department of Food Business & Development  
12.45 Dr. Donncha Kavanagh, Department of Management & Marketing

- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 13.45 Visit to core facilities. PRG programme escorted by Professor D. Hunt
- 14.15 Representatives of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Students
- Kate Noone, B Comm 1 (French)  
 Catherine Connellan, B Comm 2 (Spanish)  
 Danielle Daly, B Comm 2 (Spanish)  
 Anita Hogan, B Comm 2 (French)  
 Ciara Hartigan, B Comm 2 (French)  
 Róisín Weir, B Comm 2 (Irish)  
 Sinéad Harrington, B Comm 2 (Irish)  
 Maxine Hyde, B Comm 2 (Italian)  
 Michael Grogan, B Comm 2 (Italian)
- 14.45 Representatives of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Year Students
- Rachel O’Sullivan, B Comm 4 (Spanish)  
 Michael O’Regan, B Comm 4 (Italian)  
 Brenda Ní Ghairbhí, B Comm 4 (Irish)  
 Mairéad Cadogan, B Comm 4 (Irish)  
 Elizabeth Duggan, B Comm 4 (Irish)  
 Allsun Fanning, B Comm 4 (Italian)  
 Alan Brett, B Comm 4 (German)  
 Alison Dennehy, B Comm 3 (German)  
 Niamh Donnelly, B Comm 4 (French)  
 Niamh Drohan, B Comm 1 (German)  
 Raymond Mullins, B Comm 4 (Spanish)  
 Ciaran Avitabile, B Comm 4 (Italian)  
 Richard Mahony, B Comm 4 (Spanish)
- 15.30 Heads of Departments teaching on the programme
- Professor Connell Fanning, Head, Department of Economics  
 Professor Caroline Fennell, Head, Department of Law  
 Dr. Clodagh Harris, Department of Government  
 Professor David Mackenzie, Head, Department of Hispanic Studies  
 Professor Patrick O’Donovan, Head, Department of French
- 16.10 Heads of Departments teaching on the programme
- Dr. Mark Chu, Head, Department of Italian  
 Dr. Michael Cronin, School of Mathematical Sciences  
 Dr. Pat Enright, Department of Food Business & Development  
 Professor Sebastian Green, Head, Department of Management & Marketing  
 Professor Ciaran Murphy, Head, Department of Accounting, Finance &  
 Information Systems  
 Dr. Claire O’Reilly, Head, Department of German  
 Dr. Pádraigín Riggs, Department of Modern Irish
- 17.00 Mr. Simon Coveney, MEP via conference call
- 17.15 Representatives of recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders

Mr. Ger Burgoyne, Graduate B Comm & AIB  
Ms. Bernadette Coleman, Employer, Musgraves  
Ms. Mary Daly, Business Information Systems, UCC  
Ms. Gráinne Delaney, Graduate B Comm Euro (French)  
Ms. Anna King, Graduate B Comm Euro (French)  
Ms. Sarah Leahy, B Comm Euro (Irish)  
Ms. Tara Muller, B Comm Euro 2 (German)  
Ms. Olivia Quinn, Employer, Bank of Ireland  
Mr. Douglas Kelleher, Member of UCC's Governing Body and B Comm  
European Board of Studies

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.

***Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2006***

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Tower Room 2, North Wing, Main Quadrangle

09.00 Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs

09.30 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Ms. Rosarii Buttimer, Social Sciences Librarian

10.15 Ms. Marita Foster, International Education Office

10.30 Mr. Irial Mac Murchú, Managing Director, Nemeton, via conference call

10.50 Professor David Cox, Acting Head, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences

11.15 Ms Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

11.30 Mr. Colman Quain, Faculty Manager, Faculty of Commerce

11.50 Professor Neil Collins, Dean, Faculty of Commerce

12.10 Consideration of Issues by PRG

12.30 Professor Eleanor O'Leary, Chair, International Education Committee

13.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group

14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report

16.30 Professor Deirdre Hunt, Director of Board of Studies

17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff responsible for teaching on the degree programme by the Professor John Gaffney, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.

The presentation was not 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 speedy completion and submission of final report.

***Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2006***

Externs depart