

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Early Childhood Studies**

**Academic Year 2005/06**

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

## Peer Review

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
Dr. Maeve Conrick	Department of French, UCC	Chairperson
Dr. Ursula Kilkelly	Department of Law, UCC	Internal Member
Professor Tricia David	Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University	External Member
Professor Angela Anning	School of Education, University of Leeds	External Member

### Timetable of the Site Visit

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

The PRG found the timetable to be adequate and appropriate for the purposes of the review. There was adequate time to visit the facilities used by students, to meet with students and staff and Officers of the University and to consider issues raised during the site visit.

### Methodology

This process involved the review of an interdepartmental degree programme, rather than a single academic department. Although the criteria and methods used to assess academic departments were used here, they had to be adapted somewhat during the review process. For example, the interdepartmental nature of the degree being reviewed required that the PRG meet with staff from all four academic departments involved. Moreover, the process reviewed teaching and research from an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary perspective, rather than within an individual department. Similarly, structure, governance and management issues were addressed with reference to the interdepartmental nature of the programme rather than in the

context of individual departments. Overall, the PRG was cognisant throughout that each academic department involved in the review of the Early Childhood degree programme is being or has been reviewed in their own right as part of the Quality Promotion process at UCC. The objective of this review, therefore, was not to duplicate this process, but rather to consider the operation of the degree programme as an interdepartmental initiative.

All members of the Group participated in all meetings during the site visit with the exception of the visit to the Department of Education Resource Centre and the Department of Applied Social Studies off-print collection, which was carried out by two members of the Group, while the other two members visited the Library. While all members of the PRG contributed to all deliberations and discussions, responsibility for thematic areas was assigned to individuals within the Group for the purposes of writing the report. Consensus and unanimity prevailed at all times.

The review process benefited particularly from the extensive experience and expertise of the external members of the PRG whose insights into research and teaching in Early Childhood was invaluable to the process as a whole. For this reason, the external members took particular responsibility for the teaching and learning and curriculum aspects of the Programme.

This Report was drafted during the afternoon and evening of the second day of the site visit and finalised subsequent to the site visit via email. All members of the PRG agreed with the Report and its findings, and there was complete unanimity among the reviewers in relation to all aspects of the report and the recommendations made.

The report is divided into the following headings:

1. The Self Assessment Report
2. Programme Details, including organisation and planning;
3. Teaching and Learning;
4. Research and scholarly activity;
5. External Activity and Support Services;
6. Recommendations

## **1. The Self Assessment Report**

### **1.1 Content of the Report**

The PRG commends the staff involved in the delivery of the Early Childhood Studies programme for their constructive engagement with the review process and the preparation of the Self Assessment Report (SAR). The PRG notes that all efforts were made to include all staff responsible for delivery of the programmes in the Quality Review. While the PRG found the SAR to be informative, it notes that the report could have included more detail, as well as a greater degree of critical analysis. At the same time, the Appendices were found to be comprehensive, particularly with regard to the data on both internal and external stakeholder views, although the PRG would have wished for a more thorough analysis and synthesis of some of the rather lengthy data presented. For this reason, and due to the interdepartmental nature of the programme being reviewed, the meetings between the PRG and individual staff members from each department and students of the programme were vital and contributed significantly to the review process.

### **1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Programme**

The PRG notes and endorses the aims and objectives of the programme as stated in the SAR:

- *To enable students to develop a capacity for detached critical perspectives as well as a sound body of interdisciplinary knowledge.*
- *To enable students to have opportunities for progressive, professional development where they can reflect on, analyse and evaluate professional practice.*
- *To give students the opportunity to put into practice theories, ideas and activities generated in the taught elements of the course.*
- *To continuously review the curriculum in line with current pedagogical thinking and political, legislative and social change.*

The PRG commends the members of the Board of Studies for their efforts and enthusiasm since the development of the Degree some ten years ago. It recognises that the interdisciplinary nature of the Degree creates obstacles for development because of existing structures in UCC, which generally do not facilitate or favour interdisciplinary programmes. The PRG considers that it may perhaps be timely to review the objectives of the programme and to examine if the objectives and curriculum match the requirements of the learners, intending professionals and society at this time.

The PRG notes and applauds the research activity that has developed from the undergraduate programme, including a significant number of postgraduates pursuing studies for MPhil and PhD Degrees, and considers that there are significant opportunities to develop this interdisciplinary research further, with external funding available.

### **1.3 SWOT Analysis**

The PRG notes and commends the SWOT analysis for its detailed reflection on a wide range of issues relevant to the programme. For the most part, it agrees with the issues raised by the SWOT analysis that are discussed in a thematic way in the sections that follow.

### **1.4 Benchmarking**

The PRG notes that the Board of Studies benchmarked the degree against the University of Roehampton. While there may have been more appropriate university degree programmes to benchmark against, this was nonetheless a useful exercise. However, the PRG would have welcomed the Board's overall view as to how UCC fares compared to the University of Roehampton in this area and in particular, whether any changes are recommended on the foot of this exercise.

## **2. Programme Organisation and Management**

The BA Degree in Early Childhood Studies (ECS) is a cross-faculty, multi-disciplinary programme offered by the Departments of Education, Applied Social

Studies, Paediatrics and Child Health and Applied Psychology (see further section 3.2 below). Established in 1995 with an enrolment of 25 students, it now has an annual intake of over 100 students. As well as its academic base, the degree has two placements whereby students undertake two supervised placements totally 800 hours in the second and third years of the course. These placements are supported by Skills Laboratories and Placement Managers.

The PRG notes that this is the leading ECS course in Ireland and has been in the vanguard of the blossoming of a number of other ECS courses, and commends the work the team has done to maintain UCC's pre-eminence in this area.

## 2.1 Staffing

The following table, based on Appendix A of the SAR, summarises the staff from the contributing departments. The staff have varying levels of input into the programme and their status varies from permanent full-time to temporary part-time. The Management Team consists of a Course Director (Department of Education) and three Deputy Directors (one each from the Departments of Education, Paediatrics & Child Health and Applied Social Studies), supported by a Senior Executive Assistant. There is also a Placement Management Team.

<u>Department</u>	<u>Numbers of Academic Staff</u>	<u>Status</u>
Education	3 Academic	Full-time
	6 Academic	Part-time
	4 Placement Supervisors	Full-time
	2 Tutors	Part-time
Applied Social Studies	8 Academic	Full-time
	1 Academic	Part-time
Paediatrics & Child Health	7 Academic	Full-time
Applied Psychology	4 Academic	Full-time

The PRG notes the recommendations in the SAR for appointment of Senior Lecturers in the Department of Applied Social Studies and the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. However, it notes that there is already a system operating in UCC

whereby Lecturers may apply for promotion to Senior Lecturer positions and it recommends, therefore, that all eligible staff should be encouraged to pursue this route.

The PRG is aware that the delivery of an interdisciplinary degree programme such as the BA (Early Childhood Studies) has particular staffing implications for some departments more than others. In the light of their contribution to the teaching of the programme and the planning difficulties caused by the insecurity of several posts in the Department of Applied Social Studies, the PRG recommends that serious consideration be given to the filling of a full-time Lecturer position in that Department.

The PRG acknowledges and compliments the quality of administrative help given to the Board of Studies and notes that without this there would be an unacceptable burden on the academic staff.

The PRG considers that urgent attention should be paid to filling the Chair in Early Childhood Studies. The position of Chair needs to be examined with respect to the programme's need for leadership over a range of areas: research, curriculum review, administration and accreditation of the programme. There is a complexity at the level of interdisciplinary programmes that is not always evident at departmental level. The PRG recommends, with a view to immediate action, that the issue of the criteria for an appointment and the filling of the chair be considered by the University as soon as possible.

## **2.2 Space**

In most universities space is at a premium and this is clearly the case at UCC. Firstly, the programme office space is limited and the submission of assignments causes both a storage and a 'traffic' problem on certain days. The PRG recommends that this issue be examined with some urgency.

A second problem relates to space for both placement tutors and postgraduate students. With regard to the former, there are clear difficulties with regard to the limited accommodation currently available to placement tutors which means that they

have insufficient privacy to liaise confidentially with both students and those offering placements. With regard to postgraduate students, efforts should be made to identify a common space – for research and social purposes – in order to encourage interdisciplinary research at this level.

## **2.3 Programme Organisation and Governance**

### *2.3.1 Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities*

The PRG is aware that the University is currently undergoing the re-structuring of its academic administration and notes the opportunities that this might create for re-consideration of the governance of the programme. In particular, there is an opportunity to place the programme strategically in the new structures and this should be considered by all concerned – the Board of Studies and the Heads of the Colleges of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences and Medicine & Health. The present system of establishment of a Board of Studies with responsibility for the programme needs to be confirmed and support must be given to the Board. However, the roles and responsibilities of the Board, the Director, and the Deputy Directors need to be defined and clarified, with appropriate recognition given for the efforts of staff who are involved in the management and delivery of the programme. As it stands, a heavy administrative load falls on a small group of committed staff.

### *2.3.2 Department-based Structures and Systems*

With most interdisciplinary programmes there is a risk that the programme may become identified with one department, or with a small group of individuals. At present, funding in UCC is primarily departmentally-based and this creates difficulties for interdisciplinary programmes. Departments are resourced for their part in delivering the programme by the allocation of student and staff FTEs as appropriate. However, it was apparent to the PRG that not all the departments involved in the BA (Early Childhood Studies) Degree programme appreciated the extent of the income they were generating through involvement with the programme; for example, all departments expressed the view that they were subsidising the programme.

The University has an important role to play in the encouragement of interdisciplinary programmes, in particular in the establishment of transparent mechanisms for the allocation of resources (staffing, finances and space). The PRG is aware of the

discussions on the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) and expresses the hope that the final RAM will take account of the specific needs of interdisciplinary programmes. One possible approach would be that FTEs within interdisciplinary programmes would be given an additional weighting.

The PRG notes the management tensions that inevitably exist in programmes such as this one. The Director has no authority over staff, as this is a function of the Head of the relevant Department. This, among other things, poses a real risk to the sustainability of the degree programme, as without a Director with budget and managerial control staff contributions depend on goodwill and medium- and long-term planning is extremely difficult.

Other practical problems arise due to the interdepartmental nature of the programme. In particular, the PRG notes that the Board of Studies does not currently have access via DMIS to the marks from modules in Applied Psychology. As a result, it is not possible for the Board of Studies to hold pre-examination Board meetings where the entire profile of all students is considered. The reviewers consider this to be unacceptable and recommend that, with immediate effect, the Director be given access on the DMIS to all modules taken by all students in all years of the Degree programme.

## **2.4 Recommendations**

The PRG recommends that

- the University develop its policies and workable formulae for budgetary aspects and resource allocation for interdisciplinary degree programmes in the context of the RAM;
- the Board of Studies (BOS) review the management structure for the degree programme as a matter of immediate urgency and consider a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities;

- consideration be given to means of incentivising the participation of schools and colleges in interdisciplinary degrees;
- consideration be given to appointing a full-time permanent lecturer to the Department of Applied Social Studies in the area of Early Childhood;
- the Chair in Early Childhood Studies be filled as soon as possible;
- the Director be given access on the DMIS to all modules taken by all students in all years of the Degree programme with immediate effect;
- consideration be given to the provision of appropriate dedicated space and facilities for the administrative and pastoral support of the degree programme and in particular for the support of research postgraduate students.

### **3. Teaching and Learning**

#### **3.1 Need to Review the Conceptual Framework of the Degree**

The PRG notes that the BA (Early Childhood Studies) Degree programme has been in place for ten years and that this provides an excellent opportunity to re-examine the conceptual framework for the degree. Questions need to be framed such as: *What kind of graduates do the Board of Studies aim to develop and produce? What learning objectives and learning outcomes are appropriate to this aim? What are the processes by which the aim will be achieved? How are vocational needs of students balanced with academic attainments? What forms of assessments are most appropriate for which aspects of the student experiences? How are the programme aims to be reconciled with changing policy demands for a children's services workforce?*

The PRG recommends that the Board of Studies should consider and examine possible models for the future development of the degree programmes and the graduates it will produce. The interdisciplinary nature of the degree makes the

organisation and integration of the teaching and learning challenging, and the PRG notes that currently much of the teaching is in parallel, rather than fully integrated. The PRG recommends that the Board of Studies consider more radical developments in relation to the delivery of the teaching of the curriculum across disciplinary boundaries, especially in the later years of the programme. The reviewers were of the opinion that only the very brightest of current students understood the theoretical links between the discrete domains of the programme and its overall curriculum. The interdisciplinary nature of the programme is challenging for learners. For example, the different departmental constructs of students affects the environment in which they are taught and how early in the programmes learners are encouraged to be independent.

### **3.2 Contribution of the Department of Applied Psychology**

The PRG considers that there is a serious issue with the Applied Psychology section of the curriculum. The perception of the Department of Applied Psychology of their role is that they service the programme rather than act as a partner in the delivery of the degree. The Department does not appear to view itself as being an integral part of the programme planning or delivery. The view was expressed that they were not consulted about programme changes. The departmental representative from Applied Psychology expressed positive antipathy to teaching the students on the programme. This is a source of serious concern for the PRG, and an anxiety also expressed by the students. The PRG also notes the lack of access of the Board of Studies to Applied Psychology examination marks, external examiners, etc as being a problematic aspect of the role of Applied Psychology within the programme (see above section 2.3.2 also).

### **3.3 Quality of Teaching**

In general, the quality of teaching across the disciplines is very good and well appreciated by the students. This was evident from discussions between students and the reviewers and the evaluation forms included in the Appendices to the Self-assessment Report. The students expressed the view that more consistent use could be made of modern teaching technologies such as Blackboard.com. The PRG is concerned that students do not appear to make much use of up-to-date journals, electronic or print based, despite the good quality of resources and search systems in

the library to access them. Moreover, some of the set reading for modules appeared to need updating to prioritise recent scholarship and research in the field.

It is clear from the SAR and from meetings between staff, students and the PRG that students are regularly reviewed for their opinion on the quality of the teaching and learning experience. The PRG recommends that those involved in the Degree also consider the use of focus groups at the end of the teaching period to ascertain a range of student views. It is also important that feedback is given to students as to the outcome of such discussions and the way decisions about any subsequent changes are to be incorporated into the programme.

### **3.4 Feedback on Assignments**

The PRG considers that the assignments that the students have to complete are valuable. However, it recommends that more formal arrangements should be established to ensure the return of these assignments to the students at specified, pre-determined times. This is necessary to ensure that the students can fully benefit from the comments and feedback at strategic points in the complex, multi-disciplinary programme. The students also asked for more liaison across the disciplines to stagger assignment submission dates and this is something which the PRG supports.

### **3.5 Double Marking of Written Work**

The PRG recognises the time and resource implication of implementing a scheme whereby all written work is double-marked. However, members of the Group were of the view that some element of double-marking and moderation is necessary and would be of real benefit in terms of staff development and equity for the students within the programme.

### **3.6 Staff Student Committee**

The PRG commends the efforts made by all staff to ensure that the students are supported in all aspects of their experience in UCC. It notes the establishment of a staff student committee and commended the fact that this appears to work well. However, the PRG considers that this committee could be more robust, and in particular recommends that staff from all disciplines be represented on it.

### **3.7 Work Placements**

The PRG is of the opinion that overall the work placement experiences formed a valuable aspect of the programme. However, the students expressed the view that the timing of the two major placements back-to-back was problematic for them insofar as they are away from the university for six months in total. The PRG recommends that the timings and length of the work placements should be re-considered in the light of the aims and objectives of the programme, perhaps with a view to separating the two placements and making them of shorter duration. It also welcomes that consideration is being given to ways of maintaining the academic link between students and the university during their placements.

### **3.8 Part-Time Degree**

The PRG notes that plans had been made to enable the degree to be taken on a part-time basis. These plans have not come to fruition, as the part-time option was not economically viable. The explanation given by the team was that as part-time students must pay fees, the costs for the student of studying is a major barrier to recruiting them onto the programme. Nevertheless, the PRG recommends that active consideration be given to continuing to pursue options to study for the degree on a part-time basis, facilitating access to the programme for mature students and non-traditional students in particular.

### **3.9 Recommendations**

The PRG recommends that:

- in the interests of the students and the ongoing viability of the degree, the role of the Department of Applied Psychology in provision of service teaching in the degree programme be re-evaluated, with consideration being given to the appointment of a staff member with expertise in psychology in one of the other participating departments to contribute to this aspect of the programme;
- all assignments be returned to students by a specified date, communicated to students at the commencement of the academic year;

- serious consideration be given to double marking and moderation of both assignments and written examinations at the level of final year, initially, with a view to ensuring consistency of standards at all levels eventually;
- the staff/student committee be reformulated with representation from all participating departments and a rotating Chair;
- the timeframe of work placements and their function within the curriculum be re-considered;
- greater use be made of central resources available, in particular the Boole Library, rather than in the Dept of Education Resource Centre the Department of Applied Social Studies Off-print Collection;
- greater focus be placed on research-led teaching and learning with a concentration on theoretical currency in all reading lists and encouragement of students to make maximum use of library resources, including journal and electronic sources, and to be trained in research methods at undergraduate level.

#### **4. Research and Scholarly Activity**

##### **4.1 Overview of Research**

There are currently many research strengths in the Departments which contribute to the Early Childhood Studies Programme. Two thirds of the full-time staff involved in the Programme have PhDs and several individual members of staff are also research active. A small number of individuals have extensive research portfolios in their disciplines in the area of Early Childhood. Research at doctoral level is also very active but is based, primarily, in the Department of Education. Several PhD students have been successful in attracting research funding and others, having completed their doctoral studies, have gone on to research at post-doctoral level.

## **4.2 Encouraging Research**

While many individual staff are research active, there are others who are not. This has implications for the quality and development of the Degree in terms of ensuring that teaching is current and research led and that students learn the importance of research and critical awareness (see above section 3.2). It is also important for the personal development and promotion prospects of individual staff members. The PRG believes, therefore, that a priority must be the development of initiatives in this area to promote the development of a research culture across the disciplines as well as within them. It identifies a particular need to adopt measures to encourage all staff to become actively involved in research. The PRG believes that there is an important leadership role for senior staff on the Programme to play in both mentoring junior staff or others who are not research active, and in encouraging interdisciplinary research (including among doctoral students) in all areas of the Programme (see further below). The possibility of introducing a research mentoring programme (across as well as within departments) on a formal basis should be explored along with the need to provide interdisciplinary training to staff and students on research methods and approaches. Greater efforts should also be made to take advantage of the resources in the Research Office whose aim is to facilitate rather than to proactively encourage or develop research among staff. Efforts should be made to maximise the potential of research in Early Childhood to make a huge contribution to society and given that its currency must mean that extensive funding opportunities exist in the area. These need to be explored more strategically on an interdisciplinary and multi-professional basis. The importance of sabbatical leave should also be clearly identified among staff who should be encouraged to work towards submitting applications in order to further develop their research profiles in Early Childhood.

## **4.3 Promoting Interdisciplinary Research**

Despite the strength of research profiles in individual areas, little interdisciplinary research appears to be taking place across the cognate Departments involved in delivering the Early Childhood Studies Programme. The PRG recognises that there may be tension between department based and inter-departmental research and in particular, it understands that according to current structures in UCC the lack of a management and budget line (which may be reinforced rather than improved by the RAM model) encourages the former over the latter. For this reason, the PRG believes

that there is a need to look at ways of encouraging and promoting interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research between all staff and postgraduates involved in the area of Early Childhood. In particular, there is a need to concentrate on the development and adoption of integrated initiatives and research projects both in terms of academic peer reviewed research publications and the pursuit of research funding. The PRG recommends that an integrated research strategy be drafted among colleagues in Early Childhood and that a research committee attached to the Programme be established to facilitate this. It also recommends that consideration be given to planning a brainstorming research day to present research, explore synergies and common themes in the research of all staff working on the Programme and to explore the potential for the joint-submission of applications for interdisciplinary research funding and other academic research initiatives. The possibility of a series of research seminars, which would include members of staff and postgraduate students in all disciplines, should also be explored in order to foster interdisciplinary research in Early Childhood.

#### **4.4 Supporting Inter-disciplinary Doctoral Research**

While the PRG is impressed with the number of students undertaking doctoral research in the area of Early Childhood, there is some concern that a large proportion of the doctoral students appear to be based in the Department of Education. The PRG recommends that the range of supervisors currently involved in the supervision of doctoral research be widened and in particular, that the possibility of joint-supervision between and across Departments be explored with a view to supporting and promoting interdisciplinary doctoral study in Early Childhood. To this end also, consideration should be given to developing a programme of research activities specific to interdisciplinary doctoral research in Early Childhood. This should include a series of research seminars addressing appropriate research methodologies, relevant statistical and research software packages, and exploring the potential for publishing particularly in peer reviewed and international academic journals. An effort should also be made to identify available office space which could be allocated to PhD students undertaking research in Early Childhood. While some of these initiatives may be grouped together under the umbrella of a formal PhD Programme in Early Childhood Studies, the PRG notes that there was some concern about the credibility of a PhD in Early Childhood (linked to the current lack of full recognition of the BA

Degree by the Health Service Executive/Department of Health and Children) which should inform whether a formal or informal approach is adopted here.

## **4.5 Staff Development**

### *4.5.1 Research Support*

The above sections identify the need for support for staff development across the interdisciplinary degree programme. In particular, the PRG recommends that staff training be offered to those staff wishing to develop their research skills. Those who have not undertaken doctoral research should be strongly encouraged to do so given that a PhD qualification is a requirement for staff in a research-led university. In this context, also, the PRG recommends the development of research strategies for individual members of staff as well as at programme level.

### *4.5.2 Resource Centres*

The PRG notes that the Department of Applied Social Studies Offprint Collection is open 6 hours per week and that the Department of Education Resource Centre is open in the afternoons only, principally to facilitate students taking the PG Diploma in Education. The PRG is uncertain whether these facilities are an appropriate use of time and resources. It is also concerned about the scarcity of resources available and the quality of those resources. Overall, the reviewers are of the opinion that access to the Boole Library is a more cost effective way of allocating and using available resources. The Group recommends, therefore, that the Programme encourage students to use the Boole Library whose extensive resources are more accessible during longer opening hours.

## **4.6 Recommendations**

The PRG recommends that

- the Board of Studies examine possibilities and ways of encouraging interdisciplinary research projects with a focus on pursuit of external research funding and increasing publication in peer reviewed and international journals, by, for example,
  - Introducing a research seminar series;
  - Forming an interdisciplinary research committee;

- Organising of research presentation/away days;
- the potential for interdisciplinary PhD research across disciplines with co-supervision of students be actively promoted;
- Research-active staff should develop
  - a formal peer mentoring programme, and
  - modelling
 to encourage all staff to become research active and engaged in a research culture.

## **5. External Relations and Support Services**

### **5.1 International Profiles**

The PRG wishes to acknowledge the international profiles initiated by key members of the Early Childhood Studies team. Through their involvement in international conferences, publishing, consultancy and promotion of Ireland's National Committee of OMEP (l'Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Préscolaire – the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education) – both they and the ECS programme are known in over sixty countries.

### **5.2 Full Recognition of the Degree**

The PRG recognises that the BA (ECS) Degree has achieved wide recognition amongst external stakeholders and employers in Ireland, many of whom hold the degree in very high regard. However, there remains a need to promote knowledge of the degree and possibilities for employment and future careers in the Health Service Executive. It is clear that some ECS graduates are gaining employment in the Health Service Executive, but at levels below that for which a degree is required, owing to current regulations. The PRG urges continued negotiations with the Health Service Executive/Department of Health and Children to gain full recognition for the degree as a professional qualification to work in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care at an appropriate level. To this end, the Work Placement element of the degree is seen as extremely important. (See also comments in the section on Teaching and

Learning). However, some experience in Early Childhood settings is also regarded as important for all ECS students, irrespective of their planned career destinations, because the ability to engage with theory and evidence from research while involved in real-life experiences makes higher level demands than either theory or practice alone.

It is vital to return occasionally to consider whether a university degree should be an academic or a vocational qualification, or whether it can be both and, in view of other potential career destinations of graduates, the PRG considers it important that the new Curriculum Development Committee and the Board of Studies discuss the following issues in order to reconceptualise the purpose of the degree:-

- Should there be a non-vocational pathway through the ECS programme?
- Which professions are students being prepared for through the current programme?
- If students wish to move on to a range of professions after graduation, is one generic model of the degree feasible or should there be a number of pathways? What options could/should be considered?
- Would different undergraduate programmes be needed to fit students for different professional roles? (For example, in order for students to go on to postgraduate courses for work in teaching, the health sector, social work, residential care, and so on.) Would it be feasible to develop appropriate post-graduate courses where none currently exists at UCC, to follow on from the three-year degree?

### **5.3 Support Services**

#### *5.3.1 The Library*

The PRG found the Library facilities excellent and wishes to encourage greater use of this resource. The IT facilities in the Library were also noted with approval, as was the increasing availability of wireless access points. However, the reviewers are concerned about the apparently limited range of texts (mainly recommended books) being used by students. The PRG encourages the exploration of ways to develop greater use of the Library and specialist librarian by students, as well as the nurturing

of their independence in accessing a wide range of materials, including journal and electronic sources, and their training in research methods. Perhaps further development of coordination between teaching staff and library staff would help clarify the services being made available, as would the integration or embedding of the research skills and library use within the curriculum. This seems reasonable to the PRG, since the Library staff already have an excellent grasp of the complexities of the ECS degree and show sensitivity towards changing student needs. These issues naturally lead to the implication for the continued support of a subject librarian.

Students on the ECS degree currently enjoy strong support from the subject librarian and from the number of staff currently available to provide support and assistance on the library floor. The PRG is concerned therefore that proposals to reduce the number of staff on library floors when the new extension to the library is complete will reduce this support.

As noted above, the two Departmental Resource centres, which hold resources for ECS students are said to be hard to access, owing to their limited opening times. Greater use of the Boole Library might solve this problem, while at the same time causing the Departments involved to reconsider the use to which these rooms are put.

### *5.3.2 The Development of Bessborough*

The Self Assessment Report recommended a proposal to develop a model crèche and preschool at Bessborough. While the PRG recognises the desire to provide leadership in this area, members question the advisability of such a plan for a variety of reasons, not least the huge amount of time and effort needed for such a venture, which might serve as a distraction from other activities. The PRG recommends, therefore, that the ECS Team focus on developments recommended elsewhere in this report.

### *5.3.3 The Disability Office and Counselling Service*

The PRG found the Disability Office to be very positive about the programme. However, from discussions with students and staff, it is clear to the PRG that the University's Counselling Services are overstretched. While the PRG acknowledges that the students have a need for support, this need may, at least in some cases, be served by a Peer Mentoring scheme, with the caveat that student mentors be advised

that they cannot and should not try to take the place of the qualified Counsellors when a student is suffering severe problems. The setting up of such a scheme would require the involvement of the Counselling Service and, where appropriate, the Disability Office.

#### *5.3.4 The Careers Office*

There was further support for the Degree programme from the Careers Office but with the added endorsement that the Board of Studies continue to seek full recognition for the degree from the Health Service Executive/Department of Health and Children. The recognition of the BA (Early Childhood Studies) as a desirable if not a necessary qualification for work with young children was seen as important so that in future, graduates might gain employment with appropriate responsibilities.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

The PRG recommends that:

- negotiations actively continue to have the degree recognised by the Health Service Executive/Department of Health and Children;
- the new Curriculum Development Committee which is to be established reconceptualise the purpose of the degree in relation to vocational training and the variety of accreditation procedures required for different professional outlets;
- the Board of Studies consider the development of a range of pathways and options to address the needs of students wishing to pursue particular careers in the field of early childhood services;
- the excellent high level of support available to students in the UCC Library be retained in future developments;
- that access to student counselling supports be improved with consideration being given to providing increased training for putting in place a peer-mentoring process for students.

## 6. Recommendations for Improvement

This section gathers together the recommendations of the PRG for improvement as well as the following comments regarding the recommendations for improvement made in the Self Assessment Report:

### 6.1 Response to Recommendations made in the SAR

1. *It is imperative that a separate budget line for Early Childhood Studies (ECS) be created to ensure the long-term viability of the programme. This budget line should not be tied to any of the participating departments.*

The PRG endorses this recommendation with the additional comment that the budget should be under the control of the Director of the Programme.

2. *Given the academic standing and significant administrative duties carried by the Deputy Directors in the Departments of Applied Social Studies and Paediatrics and Child Health, it is vital that this be recognised by promotion to Senior Lecturer positions.*

The PRG notes that there are considerable staffing difficulties involved in the delivery of the Programme and agrees that prior to any appointments the reconsideration of the management structures should be agreed. The PRG notes that there are internal UCC structures for promotion and encourages eligible staff to apply via these channels.

3. *There is currently an anomaly between the three main participating departments with regard to the number of college lectureships resulting from the degree. Paediatrics and Child Health, and Education presently both have three full-time lectureship positions while Applied Social Studies has two. Given that Applied Social Studies currently teaches one third of the degree, it is vital that this anomaly is addressed.*

The PRG notes the concerns regarding the levels of staffing, in particular in the Department of Applied Social Studies and the contribution of that Department to the Degree. The PRG recommends that serious consideration be given to the filling of a permanent full-time Lecturer position in Applied Social Studies relevant to the content of the Early Childhood degree.

4. *The SWOT Analysis has uncovered the crucial need for a Curriculum Committee to oversee the overall consistency and coherence of the programme and to ensure that the individual modules provide the desired outcomes for students. We will endeavour to establish a multi-disciplinary research committee which would develop and highlight such research opportunities and, furthermore, seek to source external funding for multi-disciplinary research initiatives.*

The PRG endorses this recommendation but suggests a broader remit to the Curriculum Development Committee than that indicated in the SAR. The PRG also endorses the recommendation to set up a multidisciplinary research committee and to actively seek research income across the disciplines.

5. *The Development of a Model Crèche and Pre-school*

The PRG does not endorse this recommendation.

6. *The Establishment of a dedicated Early Childhood Studies Resource Centre*

The PRG does not endorse this recommendation.

7. *The Development of a more Comprehensive Programme of Pastoral Care*

The PRG does not endorse this recommendation.

8. *The Development of a more Democratic Management Structure for ECS*

See recommendations made by PRG in the following section.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Improvement made by the PRG**

The PRG also recommends that:

1. the University develop its policies and workable formula for budgetary aspects and resource allocation for interdisciplinary degree programmes in the context of the RAM;
2. the Board of Studies (BOS) review the management structure for the degree programme as a matter of immediate urgency and consider a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities;
3. consideration be given to means of incentivising the participation of schools and colleges in interdisciplinary degrees;
4. the Chair in Early Childhood Studies be filled as soon as possible;
5. the Director be given access on the DMIS to all modules taken by all students in all years of the Degree programme with immediate effect;
6. consideration be given to the provision of appropriate dedicated space and facilities for the administrative and pastoral support of the degree programme and in particular for the support of research postgraduate students;
7. in the interests of the students and the ongoing viability of the degree, the role of the Department of Applied Psychology in provision of service teaching in the degree programme be re-evaluated, with consideration being given to the appointment of a staff member with expertise in psychology in one of the other participating departments to contribute to this aspect of the programme;
8. all assignments be returned to students by a specified date, communicated to students at the commencement of the academic year;

9. serious consideration be given to double marking and moderation of both assignments and written examinations at the level of final year, initially, with a view to ensuring consistency of standards at all levels eventually;
10. the staff/student committee be reformulated with representation from all participating departments and a rotating Chair;
11. the timeframe of work placements and their function within the curriculum be re-considered;
12. greater use be made of central resources available, in particular the Boole Library, rather than in the Dept of Education Resource Centre the Department of Applied Social Studies Off-print Collection;
13. greater focus be placed on research-led teaching and learning with a concentration on theoretical currency in all reading lists and encouragement of students to make maximum use of library resources, including journal and electronic sources, and to be trained in research methods at undergraduate level;
14. the Board of Studies examine possibilities and ways of encouraging interdisciplinary research projects with a focus on pursuit of external research funding and increasing publication in peer reviewed and international journals, by, for example,
  - a. Introduction of a research seminar series;
  - b. Formation of an interdisciplinary research committee;
  - c. Organisation of research presentation/away days;
15. the potential for interdisciplinary PhD research across disciplines with co-supervision of students be actively promoted;
16. Research-active staff should develop
  - a. a formal peer mentoring programme, and
  - b. modelling

to encourage all staff to become research active and engaged in a research culture;

17. negotiations actively continue to have the degree fully recognised by the Health Service Executive/Department of Health and Children;
18. the new Curriculum Development Committee which is to be established reconceptualise the purpose of the degree in relation to vocational training and the variety of accreditation procedures required for different professional outlets;
19. the Board of Studies consider the development of a range of pathways and options to address the needs of students wishing to pursue particular careers in the field of early childhood services;
20. the excellent high level of support available to students in the UCC Library be retained in future developments;
21. that access to student counselling supports be improved with consideration being given to providing increased training for putting in place a peer-mentoring process for students.

**Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit**

**Early Childhood Studies**

***Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005***

- 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 Programme and Co-ordinating Committee.

***Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2005***

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

All meetings took place in this venue except where specifically indicated below.

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

- 09.00 Dr. Francis Douglas, Director, BA (Early Childhood Studies) Degree Programme

- 09.30 Meeting with all members of Board of Studies for BA (Early Childhood Studies) Degree

Venue: Room 2.55, O'Rahilly Building

- 10.30 Tea/Coffee

- 10.45 Meetings with members of staff.

10.45 - Aoife Duggan, Administration

10.58 - Dr. Mary Horgan, Deputy Director

11.11 - Dr. Deirdre Horgan, Deputy Director

11.24 - Dr. Anne Gaffney, Deputy Director

11.37- Dr. Anna Ridgway (Placement Manager)

11.50 - Patricia O'Connor (Deputy Placement Manager)

12.03 - Eileen Hogan, Department of Applied Social Studies

12.16 - Dr. Claire Edwards, Department of Applied Social Studies

12.29 - Dr. Geraldine Boylan, Department of Paediatrics/Child Health

- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group

- 14.00 Representatives of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year BA (ECS) Undergraduate Students

Aoife Ryng, 1<sup>st</sup> Year, Irish Student

Jayne Burke, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, FETAC Student

Kara Dudman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, International Student

Katherine Murphy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, Mature Student

Melisa O'Mahony, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, Special Needs Student

Martine Vatland, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, Non-EU Student  
Nicola Carey, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year, Irish Student  
Marina Swift, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year, Transfer Student

14.30 Representatives of Postgraduate Students

James Hurley, Dip Psych 1 (Applied Psychology )  
Caroline Vasseur, MSocial Work 1 (Applied Social Studies)  
Emma Terry, MSocial Work 2 (Applied Social Studies)  
Maria Cassidy, PhD 1 (Paediatrics/Child Health)  
Susan Burke, PhD 2 (Education)  
Marcella Towler, PhD 2 (Education)  
Jennifer Sturley, PhD recently submitted (Paediatrics/Child Health)

15.00 Researchers

Judith Butler, PhD (Education); Lecturer in Further Education; ongoing research in Special Needs  
Maura Cunneen, PhD (Education), Lecturer, Department of Education, UCC; Current Funded Research on Gender and Young Children (€3,000)  
Mary Daly, PhD (Education); Applying for IRCHSS Post Doc Scholarship  
Rosaleen Murphy, PhD (Education); recently completed Post Doc Research; Publishing Book on Research Methods in the Early Years  
Vanessa Murphy, PhD (Education), Lecturer in the BA ECS in Cork Institute of Technology; ongoing research

15.30 Tea/coffee

Consideration of issues by PRG

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

16.30 Professor David Cox, Acting Head, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences / Dean, Faculty of Arts  
Professor Michael Murphy, Acting Head, College of Medicine & Health / Dean, Faculty of Medicine & Health

17.00 Representatives of recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders

- Lucy Connolly, *Irish Preschool Playgroups Association*
- Máire Uí Chonghaile, *Inspector, Department of Education & Science*
- Miriam Verling, *Montessori School*

Venue: Staff Common Room

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 7<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

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

08.40 Professor Peter Kennedy, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

- 09.15 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services, and Ms. Rosarii Buttimer, Subject Librarian
- 10.00 Visit to Department of Education Resource Room and Department of Applied Social Studies Offprint Collection, escorted by Dr. Francis Douglas
- 10.30 Consideration of issues by PRG
- 11.20 Heads of Departments contributing to BA Degree Programme  
 Dr. Jurek Kirakowski, Department of Applied Psychology  
 Professor Fred Powell, Department of Applied Social Studies  
 Dr. Tom Mullins, Department of Education
- 11.50 Ms. Mary O'Grady, Head, Student Disability Support Service
- 12.05 Ms. Mary McNulty, Deputy Head, Student Careers Service
- 12.20 Professor Áine Hyland, Chair, Board of Studies
- 12.40 Professor Tony Ryan, Department of Paediatrics & Child Health
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Consideration of issues and preparation of first draft of final report
- 16.30 Dr. Francis Douglas, Director of Degree Programme
- 17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Degree Programme by the Chair and members of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. The presentation was not for discussion at this time.
- 18.30 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified followed by a working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group.

***Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2005***

Externs depart