

Quality Review of Irish Universities by EUA

**Report to Governing Body from the Quality Promotion Committee
on progress in implementation of recommendations for improvement
made by EUA**

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1. Introduction

The Governing Body has already received a detailed report on the EUA Quality Review of Irish Universities and has considered the two reports arising from that review and the recommendations for improvement arising from the reports.

The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) has been requested by the HEA to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to monitor reports from the Universities on actions taken and improvements made.

The IUQB has appointed a small subgroup as a task force to oversee the implementation and to comment on the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Universities.

This report details the recommendations arising from the EUA Report on Quality in UCC and the EUA Report on Quality in Irish Universities, comments on the status of each one within UCC, and where necessary and as appropriate, the actions recommended. The commentary below has been considered by the Quality Promotion Committee and is being submitted to the Governing Body for consideration and approval.

University response

The University welcomed the report of the EUA team that visited UCC to conduct a review of its quality procedures and their effectiveness. In particular the University welcomed the positive comments on the quality review process itself and the recognition of how quickly such a process has been accepted and bedded-down in the university.

The University acknowledged the comments on the integration of the outcomes of quality reviews with the processes of re-structuring and strategic planning. The three processes – strategic planning, re-structuring and quality reviews - are linked in UCC and work is continuously on-going to strengthen these links.

Implementation Committee

The Quality Promotion Committee, a committee of the Governing Body of UCC and chaired by the President of UCC, Professor G.T. Wrixon, is acting as the implementation and monitoring body within the university. The Quality Promotion Committee is responsible for the monitoring of the development of plans for actions to be taken as a result of the recommendations. In a number of the recommendations the implementation is the responsibility of bodies such as Academic Council and the Deans of the Colleges and Faculties.

Action to date

The reports (both the Sectoral and UCC reports) were circulated very widely within the University community as soon as possible after receipt. They have been placed on the University website and the attention of all staff has been drawn to them. Presentations on the reports and the recommendations contained within them were made by the Director of Quality Promotion, Dr. N. Ryan, to the Governing Body, to the Academic Council and all Faculties prior to the summer break. All bodies were asked to consider the report and the implications of them of the recommendations for

improvement, with a request that a report be made back to the Quality Promotion Committee in the Autumn.

Because of the late publication of the reports there has only been one meeting of the academic bodies listed above since the launch of the report. All the bodies are scheduled to meet again in October/November when it is anticipated that further updates on progress in implementation will be made.

2. EUA Report on UCC

As can be seen from the text of the recommendations below many of them are for implementation on a medium-to-long term basis. The responses in the right hand column are as specific as possible at this time.

Recommendations and response to note in particular: 3, 5, 9, 11

Comment on specific recommendations

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
1.	<i>Link the three central processes underway at UCC – strategic planning, restructuring and Quality Review – in order to ensure greater coherence and better understanding of these across the university</i>	<p>The three central processes are linked in UCC. There is a new strategic planning process in place with a Committee of the Governing Body charged with overseeing the development of a new strategic plan for the university for 2006 – 2010. The outcomes of the quality reviews conducted to date in UCC (5/6ths of the total number of departments and units in the university) are a central focus in the development of the new plan and a synthesis of the strengths, issues to be worked on and opportunities arising from outcomes of quality reviews has been included in the documentation circulated to academic bodies and about to be circulated to Governing Body for consideration.</p> <p>Regular updates are available to all staff of the university through an Intranet information site established by the Office of the VP for Planning, Communications & Development. All documents considered by the Committee, including those detailing outcomes of quality reviews, are available to all staff through the intranet.</p> <p>The Director of Quality Promotion is a member of the Strategic Planning Committee.</p> <p>The university is involved in the process of academic re-structuring and has recently completed an extensive consultative process with staff and students. The Governing Body has approved the re-structuring and work is on-going, taking into very active consideration the outcomes from quality reviews, to implement the re-structuring.</p>

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
2.	<p><i>Focus the main thrust of the QR process at cognate groups of Departments e.g. Faculties or Schools, in order to obtain more structured outputs</i></p>	<p>Under Ireland's <i>Universities Act 1997</i> there is a requirement that the university conducts quality reviews of departments and faculties, as well as the institution. The University conducts reviews of academic departments and programmes, as well as academic support and administrative units, research centres, faculties and the institution. Interdisciplinary programmes are delivered by groups of cognate academic departments and these programmes are reviewed separately to reviews of academic departments, as well as forming a part of academic departmental reviews. This will facilitate the further development of interdisciplinary programmes. Reviews of faculties were deferred in the first cycle because of the academic re-structuring that is taking place in UCC at the present time. Reviews of faculties are planned for early in the next cycle of reviews, which will commence in 2006/07. The re-structuring process may also result in different groupings of departments and units being formed and these will be reviewed during the second cycle. It is also intended to conduct some 'horizontal' reviews of issues, for example the quality of the postgraduate experience, decision-making processes, in the second cycle. These are currently under discussion by the Quality Promotion Committee and decisions will be taken before Christmas 2005.</p>
3.	<p><i>Include more external reviewers on the peer review groups and remove all links between the Department under review and the choice of peer reviewers: involve Faculties and Schools more actively in this.</i></p>	<p>UCC notes this recommendation. In the first cycle of quality reviews there has been a real benefit to the system in the spread and sharing of knowledge because of the policy to use a mix of internal and external reviewers. This was absolutely essential in the first round of reviews because of the importance of gaining internal acceptance of the process in phase one.</p> <p>The university will review the quality process on completion of cycle one (2006) and will focus in particular on methods for selection of peer reviewers in cycle two in line with this recommendation. The issue of the method of appointment of reviewers is one which is presently being discussed at the sectoral level and will form an item on the agenda of the IUA Quality Officers Group meetings. This group will bring forward recommendations to</p>

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
		the IUQSC (Irish Universities Quality Steering Committee) with the intention of putting in place a system which will be applied across the sector. This will be discussed with IUQB prior to implementation.
4.	<i>Formulate an overview from results of the QR process and use this as a strategic tool for the development of priorities and the allocation of both human and financial resources</i>	Implemented. This is already in place, and has been in place since the formal introduction of the Quality Review process in UCC in 2000. The overview of the outcomes of quality reviews is central to the discussions surrounding the strategic planning process and the current re-structuring in UCC. In the development of the new funding allocation mechanism which UCC hopes to put in place and be operational in 2006, issues arising from quality reviews are central to the discussions of the criteria that will be used in the mechanism.
5.	<i>Ensure discussion in the Governing Body of the strategic vision of the future of the university, and for this vision to be expressed in terms of priorities</i>	This is a core element of the development of the new strategic plan and the re-structuring that is currently being implemented. As a consequence of the present discussions priorities will be agreed by the Governing Body. A special meeting of the Governing Body was held on 4 th October 2005 with the University's draft strategic plan as the only item on the agenda.
6.	<i>Develop interdisciplinarity to strengthen research competences and to attract students to interesting new areas of study</i>	UCC is very committed to the development of further interdisciplinary interactions and collaborations both at the undergraduate degree and postgraduate and research levels. A number of measures are in place to encourage participation in such activities and the new funding allocation mechanism currently under discussion will include criteria for funding allocation to reward interdisciplinarity. The University has appointed Professor A Hyland to chair a committee convened to discuss how interdisciplinary degree programmes can best be supported in UCC over the next number of years.
7.	<i>Develop internationalisation and use it as a lever for change</i>	UCC leads Ireland in the percentage of non-EU students it attracts. The university is currently revising its undergraduate curriculum, with a view to facilitate increases in the transfer of UCC students to universities abroad and the attraction in of overseas

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
		<p>students during their studies for the primary degree.</p> <p>The University is a very active participant in Programmes such as the Socrates and Erasmus programmes and in the Framework Programme. These programmes involve significant collaborations with European universities, especially at the postgraduate and research levels. UCC has the highest success rate in Ireland in attracting the Marie Curie Fellowships. UCC will work constantly towards improving this performance overall, including a particular focus on staff/student mobility.</p> <p>The University has decided to set up an Institute for Chinese Studies and is actively pursuing possibilities for attracting students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels from Asia.</p>
8.	<p><i>Seek out and develop more strategic alliances with other Irish institutions and networks</i></p>	<p>Much has been achieved in this area in the past five years and dramatic changes have occurred. UCC is actively pursuing this agenda and has a number of strategic alliances with other universities in Ireland already in place. The following is a list of some of the most striking achievements of the university in this area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps the most significant initiative in terms of strategic alliances in Ireland has been the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions in Ireland. UCC has been one of the most successful participants in the programme to date. The programme encourages the development of strategic alliances both within Ireland and abroad. • Science Foundation Ireland is a major player in the funding of internationally reviewed research in Ireland. To date UCC has been successful in attracting 25% of the funds allocated to date from the total funding of €646 million which is available between 2000-2006. SFI provides grants for researchers from around the world and based in Ireland, for outstanding research visitors, for conferences and symposia, and for collaboration with industry. SFI chooses

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
		<p>award recipients in the fields underpinning biotechnology (BioT) and information and communications technology (ICT) through merit review by distinguished scientists.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another recent example of UCC's success in developing strategic alliances with institutions abroad is the agreement between UCC and UCD to create an Institute of Chinese Studies specifically for the provision of opportunities for Chinese students to study in Ireland for part of their degree programme and for Irish academics to deliver some parts of programmes in Chinese universities. • UCC has extensive collaborative links with Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), and was singled out in the recent government-commissioned review of higher education in Ireland by the OECD for the only university in Ireland with links to an institution outside the university sector in Ireland. • In addition, the University is a part of the AUA (Atlantic University Alliance), which is a strategic alliance of the University of Limerick, the National University of Ireland Galway and UCC. • The National Access Programme is designed to support and facilitate collaboration between ICT hardware research throughout Ireland at postgraduate level and UCC's Tyndall National Institute plays a core part in this. • In addition, in a number of research areas UCC is a partner in Socrates and Erasmus programmes and has received significant EU funding towards many interdisciplinary programmes and inter-institutional networks. <p>It is the intention of the University to continue the progress that has been made in this area of activity to date.</p>

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
9.	<i>Put in place a fully integrated management information system, and use it as a basis for strategic management and change.</i>	<p>The University recognises the need for a fully integrated management information system. Significant progress has been made in the development of a portal on the university Intranet which links information on student numbers, financial and human resources information. This will provide the information for decision-making in the future.</p> <p>This is also under discussion at the sectoral level in recognition of the necessity to use similar systems and measures across the sector.</p>
10.	<i>Examine further potential and more coherent used of IT across UCC for the benefit of staff and students, especially for access to documentation</i>	<p>UCC has already made very significant progress in the coherent use of IT and developments are on-going. UCC will continue to work to improve the facilities available to both students and staff in this area.</p>
11.	<i>Make special efforts to ensure postgraduate students, especially doctoral students, have opportunities to join collective and transversal structures and teams across the university, and thus to become the researchers and faculty members of the future which UCC and Ireland will need.</i>	<p>A report on conditions and facilities for postgraduate students was presented to the Governing Body in late 2004. The Governing Body considered the report and the recommendations for improvement it contained. The Governing Body endorsed the report and work is underway towards implementing the recommendations contained in the report.</p> <p>The University has introduced a programme of support for postgraduate students across all disciplines in the university. The programme commenced formally in October 2004, and it is planned to further expand the range of activities in 2005/06, with the development of generic modules for postgraduate training, applicable to many disciplines. A research forum has been established which integrates researchers, postgraduates, research staff and academics, from all disciplines.</p> <p>UCC, in partnership with the other Universities in Ireland and working with the Irish Universities Quality Board, participated in a cross-sectoral project in 2003/4. The outcome of the project has been the publication of a set of guidelines for the organisation and conduct of PhD programmes in universities in Ireland, entitled “<i>Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Universities</i>”.</p>

	Recommendation to UCC	Action taken/planned to date
		Thus UCC is already actively considering how best to support and enhance the experience and education of postgraduates, and will continue to do so.

3. EUA Quality Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities

Sectoral Report

The IUA Quality Officers Group has met a number of times to consider in detail the recommendations arising from the EUA Quality Review of Irish Universities Sectoral Report. A draft document has been prepared which was discussed at the meeting of the IUQSC (Irish Universities Quality Steering Committee) held on 17th October 2005 in UCC. The IUQSC approved the document and this has been forwarded to the IUQB (Irish Universities Quality Board).

In the text in this section of the report there is a detailed response on each of the sectoral recommendations for improvement as to the situation in UCC. UCC is already implementing the majority of the recommendations and has been so since the formal introduction of the quality review process. Full discussions on the recommendations have already taken place in the University and the University is committed to implementation of all the recommendations, where possible.

The Table below provides brief commentary on the recommendations contained in the sectoral report and the situation in UCC with respect to each of them. However decisions taken at the sectoral level may influence the implementation of some of the recommendations, where applicable.

Recommendations and response to note in particular: 13, 14, 21, 23, 24, 26.

Main Recommendations concerning Quality Assurance

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
<i>Organisation and planning of QA process</i>		
1.	<i>The contribution of QA to university strategy and planning should be stressed to all involved in the process.</i>	Implemented. See earlier comment in response to recommendation in UCC report.
2.	<i>It should be clear from the start of the process that the results of each evaluation will be discussed between the senior management, including the President, and the unit evaluated.</i>	Implemented. This has been and is part of the procedures in UCC. Meetings are held and a very detailed response and feedback is given to each unit evaluated.

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
3.	<i>The university President's overall responsibility for the QA process and role as one of its main beneficiaries should be underlined.</i>	Implemented. The President of UCC chairs all meetings of the Quality Promotion Committee of the GB. The committee considers the reports on quality reviews of units evaluated and the university response to the unit. This system has been in place since the introduction of the formal QA review system in 2000.
4.	<i>This overall responsibility of the President and senior management for the process should not lessen the fundamental ownership of each evaluation by the unit in question.</i>	Implemented. It is the view of the University that ownership by the unit in question must be a core element of the process if the ultimate aim of quality improvement is to be maximised.
<i>Self-assessment phase</i>		
5.	<i>The self-assessment reports produced by any unit under review should not exceed 30 pages, excluding additional annexes.</i>	Implemented. Broadly in line with the present guidelines for preparation of self-assessment reports in UCC. An explicit statement to this effect is included in guidelines for 2005/06.
6.	<i>The self-assessment phase should not last longer than three months.</i>	Implemented. This is presently the situation. Presently units to be evaluated receive at least 1.5 years notice of a review being scheduled. Most units have received 5 years notice. However the self-assessment period is not normally longer than three months. Data collection, e.g. views of students and other stakeholders, occurs as and when most appropriate.
7.	<i>All units need to ensure that students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are involved systematically in the self-assessment and that their opinions and contributions are included in the reports.</i>	Implemented. This is the requirement in the present system in UCC and has been since 2000.

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
8.	<i>All units need to take proper account of the evolving institutional and external environments when undertaking their self-assessment, looking at the opportunities and threats these may present and situating themselves within these contexts.</i>	Implemented This is the requirement in the review system in UCC. (All units and departments are required to undertake a SWOT analysis and benchmarking)
9.	<i>Units undergoing review need systematically to consider their links to the relevant university services and to make sure these links are covered by the review process.</i>	Implemented. This is the requirement in the present system in UCC and has been since 2000.
10.	<i>Units undergoing review should make explicit links between the formal quality review process and any other QA mechanisms which they may also operate. The potential synergies between these are vital.</i>	Implemented. This is the requirement in the present system in UCC and has been since 2000.
11.	<i>The Irish universities need to ensure coherent and regular student feedback on all courses and modules, and for this feedback to be an explicit input to the QA process.</i>	Implemented. This feedback is a specific requirement in the QA procedures in place in UCC. However we do not have a <u>formal</u> coherent and regular student feedback system in UCC. Many informal mechanisms exist. This will be an item on the agenda of the appropriate academic bodies for 2005/06 with decisions taken as to the precise format of the implementation by the end of the academic year.
Peer review phase		
12.	<i>Universities should ensure that the guidelines and terms of reference supplied to peer review teams encourage a broad view of quality, including sufficient emphasis on research, interdisciplinarity and internationalisation. These guidelines should also ensure that any ensuing recommendations are clear, realistic, and distinguish between those needing new investment and those where improvements can be made without significant additional resources.</i>	Implemented. This is the requirement in the present system in UCC and has been since 2000.

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
13.	<i>The composition of peer review teams needs to be more flexible, in order to respond to the need for strategic benchmarking with other universities worldwide and to respect the diversity of profiles and structures among the Irish universities.</i>	The composition of peer review groups appointed to conduct quality reviews in UCC does need to be considered and it is the intention of the Quality Promotion Committee to do so prior to the commencement of the second cycle of reviews scheduled to commence in 2006/07. The Quality Promotion Committee is awaiting the outcome of discussions on this issue, which are taking place at the sectoral level.
14.	<i>The choice of peers should be independent of the unit under review.</i>	As for 13. above
Quality improvement		
15.	<i>Following each review, the unit and the senior university management should hold a short seminar to discuss the evaluation and proposals for improvement and action.</i>	UCC does not currently do this. However the Quality Promotion Committee does carefully consider the review report and the response of the unit evaluated to the report and then formally responds in detail to the unit. The view of the University is that this is equivalent to the seminar in that there is very detailed and careful consideration of the outcomes of each review by senior management and these are communicated to the Unit and discussed with the relevant Dean/Vice-President.
16.	<i>A maximum of six months should be set for agreeing a quality improvement plan (QIP).</i>	Implemented. The requirement in the present system in UCC is that the QIP must be agreed and submitted for approval to the Quality Promotion Committee within <u>three</u> months from consideration of the outcome of the review by the Quality Promotion Committee. The University does not intend to amend this timeframe.
17.	<i>These quality improvement plans should be taken into account in the strategic management and other university-wide processes.</i>	Implemented. This is the requirement in the present system in UCC. Deans/Vice-Presidents are involved in the drawing up of the QIP.

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
18.	<i>The university management must respond to these plans, even in cases where resources are scarce.</i>	Implemented. The involvement of the relevant Dean/VP ensures university management is involved. A response is made to the Unit and this is monitored by the Quality Promotion Unit.
19.	<i>Information on the implementation of agreed quality improvement plans should be included in the university's annual quality assurance reports.</i>	Implemented. This is the present situation (see the Annual reports of the Quality Promotion Committee to Governing Body on the Quality Promotion Unit web site http://www.ucc.ie/quality)
20.	<i>The universities should consider their entire budgets as quality improvement funds.</i>	The University would argue that this is already the situation as all budgetary decisions are taken on the basis of assuring and improving the quality of education and all related activities.
<i>Strategic governance and management</i>		
21.	<i>The scheduling of evaluations should be approached in a more strategic way.</i>	This is planned for the second cycle. This will be discussed by the Quality Promotion Committee in October – December 2005 and it is planned that proposals will be brought forward for approval to Governing Body in January 2006.
22.	<i>Universities should explore the possibilities for linking the quality review cycle to other strategic cycles.</i>	Difficult issue as strategic planning is on a 5-year basis. In practical terms it would be impossible to review all departments / units / faculties, etc in the same year.
23.	<i>Universities should consider reviewing groups of cognate units (faculties, etc) to achieve a better overview of how teaching, learning and research can develop across these units, and to break down current boundaries to inter-disciplinary work.</i>	Reviews of Faculties and Colleges and other cognate units are planned for the second cycle due to commence in 2006/07.
24.	<i>Universities should also consider reviewing university-wide issues, not linked to any one unit, but essential for the ongoing strategic development of the institution.</i>	Very serious consideration of this will be given by the Quality Promotion Committee for the second cycle of reviews.

Recommendation		Comment by UCC
25.	<i>There is a need to ensure the regular analysis and overview of the QA process and outcomes across each university, and to link these explicitly to strategic management processes.</i>	Implemented. Quality Promotion Committee does analyse and review every year and this is reported in the report to Governing Body. The links to strategic management need to be enhanced but are significantly improving.
26.	<i>All universities need to strengthen their capacities for institutional analysis and monitoring, to provide better information for strategic governance and management. Better management information systems are also needed in most universities. The QA process must both contribute to and benefit from these.</i>	UCC welcomed this recommendation and is working on implementation, under the direction of the Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development. All Irish universities are also cooperating on this issue.
27.	<i>Leadership should be aware of the real dangers of “paralysis by analysis”. The burden of procedures must not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture, and a standardized approach must not obscure the primary focus on quality improvement. Procedures and approaches need to be kept simple and timely.</i>	This is to be welcomed and the Quality Promotion Committee will consider this carefully for the second cycle. However a balance must be struck and provision of information from the centre and improved information systems are needed to significantly reduce the burden for units preparing for evaluation. Plans to improve the current situation in terms of availability of information are well underway and implementation has commenced.
28.	<i>There is a need to maximise collaboration in research, infrastructure, human resources and strategic development across the Irish universities in order to develop the critical mass necessary to be competitive in certain areas. The Irish QA framework can contribute greatly to this collaboration.</i>	For all seven universities to consider.

Recommendation	Comment by UCC
<p>29. <i>Given the healthy university-led approach so far, the lack of any governmental agency and the relatively modest investments in QA, it is suggested that the universities estimate how much time and money have been used so far in setting up and operating the quality assurance and quality improvement process, and clarify the benefits obtained. Such an analysis could then help the universities, individually and collectively, to link back to the four basic methodological questions and see to what extent these investments have been effective and efficient in helping to clarify</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>what they are trying to do,</i> - <i>how they are trying to do it,</i> - <i>how they know it works, and</i> - <i>how they change in order to improve.</i> 	<p>This recommendation is under consideration and discussion at the sectoral level.</p>

4. Recommendations for Approval by Governing Body

1. That the Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development be made an *ex officio* member of the Quality Promotion Committee.
2. That the Director of Quality Promotion be appointed as an *ex officio* member of the Strategic Planning Committee.
3. That the Governing Body approve this report and its publication.

Quality Promotion Committee

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Dr. R. Griffin
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21st October 2005