EUA
European University Association
Institutional Evaluation Programme

REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

Review of the Effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Universities

University Reports

HEA
Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

IUQB
IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD

The Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities was jointly commissioned by the Higher Education Authority and the Irish Universities Quality Board

REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES:
BACKGROUND

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Irish Universities are required under section 35 of the Universities Act (1997) to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". In 2003, the Irish universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and delegated to this body the function of arranging the reviews of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in the individual universities. Furthermore, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) may, under Section 49 of the Universities Act, review quality assurance procedures in the universities.

The first formal review of Quality Assurance procedures and their effectiveness in the seven Irish universities commenced in January 2004 and was completed in February 2005. In order to facilitate a more timely and effective review process, the HEA and the IUQB jointly commissioned the review, which was undertaken by the European University Association (EUA). The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of 135 universities in 33 countries during the past ten years. The process agreed by the HEA and IUQB for the Quality Review of Irish Universities is presented in Section 3 of this document.

The EUA was requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision-making and strategic planning. It was further requested that these key elements should be placed within an institutional context, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management.

The review process commenced with the preparation by each university of a detailed self-evaluation report. This report was prepared in consultation with staff and students of the university, and in accordance with EUA guidelines, focussed on the following four questions:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

Each university was then the subject of a preliminary site visit (two days duration) by a EUA review team composed of independent experts in quality assurance from Europe and North America. The purpose of this preliminary site visit was to allow the review team to gain an understanding of the environment and to measure the robustness of the self-evaluation reports against the reality on the ground. A further site visit to each institution (three days duration) took place some four or five months later, after which time individual university reports were prepared by the EUA review team. These reports were sent to the IUQB who forwarded the final reports to the individual universities. In addition, the EUA review team prepared a crosscutting sectoral report for the HEA. The individual university reports are contained in Section 2 of this document.

In April 2005, the *Review of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Universities* was launched by the Minister for Science and Education, Ms Mary Hanafin, T.D. Following the launch, the individual universities reports were published on the university websites and the crosscutting sectoral report was published on the HEA website.

Acknowledgement

The HEA and the IUQB wishes to acknowledge the co-operation received from all those involved in the *Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities* and to thank the universities and their staff for their commitment to the task. In particular the HEA and the IUQB would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the EUA review teams and their Secretariat.

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORTS:
INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEWS

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(February 2005)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Irish universities are required under the 1997 Universities Act to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". For this purpose, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and all seven Irish universities represented by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake this review with the participation of experts from Europe, the USA and Canada.

The review of all seven Irish universities took place in a coordinated manner during the calendar year 2004, using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These guidelines were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish quality review. The process is designed to ensure that each individual university, the university system as a whole, and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts. This methodology also ensures that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities are reviewed against best practice internationally.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of some 135 universities in some 33 countries during the past ten years. The tenth anniversary of the EUA programme was celebrated during 2004.

Under the joint IUQB/HEA commission, the EUA was requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision making and strategic planning.

It was further requested that these key elements should be placed within an institutional analysis, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management.

EUA institutional reviews are usually based on an agreement between the university and the EUA, although there have been cases where the state authorities have accepted an EUA evaluation or review as part of a national quality assurance programme, without any special terms of reference. In the case of the Quality Review of Universities in Ireland, the HEA is clearly also an interested party in the process.

Following the formal request from the President of Dublin City University (DCU), the Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a team for the review of quality at DCU. This team was composed of:

- Jarmo Visakorpi, former Rector, University of Tampere, Finland, former Chair, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, as chair;
- Julio Pedrosa, former Rector, University of Aveiro, former Minister of Education, Portugal;
- Robin Farquhar, Professor Emeritus and former President, Carleton University and former President, The University of Winnipeg, Canada;
- Janet O'Sullivan, executive development officer at the Haute Ecole de Commerce, Paris, France, as secretary.

The team came to DCU for a preliminary visit from 25 to 27 April 2004 and for a main visit from 3 to 6 October 2004. Lewis Purser, Programme Manager at the European University Association, stood in as team secretary for the main visit, Janet O'Sullivan being unfortunately obliged to withdraw for reasons of health.

The team met the President, Deputy and Vice-Presidents; representatives from Governing Authority, Academic Council, Student Union; staff and students of many Faculties and Schools and staff from a number

of support units; and representatives of external stakeholders from business and industry as well as from the local community.

The team also had special meetings with persons representing DCU Schools and units which had been reviewed as part of DCU's Quality Review process (QRP), and read the reports to Governing Authority of Quality Reviews and of the Implementation of Recommendations at several Schools and units.

2. Process

The EUA quality review methodology is guided by four central strategic questions. These questions, which have also been taken adopted by the IUQB in its Framework for Quality in Irish Universities, are:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

The EUA team used these questions as its framework when reviewing the quality assurance process at DCU, within the wider institutional strategic setting. This approach was obviously familiar to those the team met during its visits since it is very similar to the quality review process adopted by DCU from the year 2000 on.

The process for the review of quality assurance at DCU started after the preparatory seminar for all Irish universities on 20 January 2004. During this seminar, the EUA review team members were able to meet the DCU President, Deputy President and Director of Quality Promotion and set the timetable for the work. DCU then appointed a steering committee according to the EUA guidelines. The DCU steering committee was chaired by the Deputy President. It appointed a further four sub-groups to discuss the main issues: teaching and learning, research and commercialisation, quality assurance processes and strategic planning, decision making and communication. The final draft of the DCU self-evaluation report (SER) was approved at the end of March, and received in good time by the EUA team before its preliminary site visit, which was the first of these visits to the Irish universities. This calendar shows that the process of preparing for the EUA review was an intensive one and well managed.

Although the preparation time was short, the SER was an honest and critical document, written from an analytical and problem-solving perspective. The report was clearly derived from the basic discussions in the four issue groups and their subgroups, the reports of which were also included. The SER followed the EUA guidelines and answered the core questions in each chapter. The open and participatory nature of the self-evaluation process, and the frankness of the SER were both commendable.

During the EUA team's visits, discussions were fruitful and were conducted in a very transparent way. The university was well prepared for the EUA visits, with the background to the team's presence and tasks well explained. The process at DCU was well prepared and well organized.

The EUA review team would like to thank the DCU President, Prof. Ferdinand von Prondzynski, and Deputy President, Prof. Albert Pratt, and all the staff, students and external stakeholders for their warm welcome and for many helpful and open discussions during its preliminary and main review visits. The team especially wishes to thank Dr. Padraig Walsh, Director of Quality Promotion, and his staff for their untiring interest and support and great efficiency in liaising with the EUA team.

3. DCU Profile

DCU is one of the youngest university institutions in Ireland, established as the National Institute for Higher Education Dublin in 1975. With approximately 10,000 students today it is a medium-, some might say optimum-sized institution, located on a modern campus on the north side of Dublin city. The university has also some important institutional links, e.g. to St. Patrick's College, the largest primary teacher training college in Ireland.

From the beginning, the university has had a clear strategic vision of what it wants to do: to fulfil the national requirements for a highly-trained workforce in the areas of business, science and electronics, computer technology and communication and languages. Although these goals were originally formulated when the statutory basis of the Institute was signed into the law in the early 1980s, they still fit very well in the contemporary society of the early 21st century. This vision has been providing a clear guideline for DCU for almost thirty years now, and even in the current strategic plan "Leading Change" (2001-2005) is clearly visible.

As part of this initial vision, DCU has been a pioneer in introducing work placement schemes as an integral part of its study programmes; likewise, its degree programmes were among the first in Ireland to be explicitly interdisciplinary. DCU has traditionally tried to differentiate itself from other universities by creating niches and offering programmes that are not available in other institutions. As such, the university has established a strong brand and reputation, particularly among students and the younger professional generations.

4. Mission and Vision

The EUA methodology uses the university's mission and vision as starting points in reviewing what the university is trying to do. However, the EUA team noticed that at DCU the words "mission" and "vision" are not often used. These concepts are incorporated implicitly into the strategic plan "Leading Change", to which frequent reference is made by a wide cross-section of the university community. The main lines of "Leading Change" could in fact be written as mission and vision statements but are not.

"Leading Change" was developed after the appointment of a new President in 2000 and in-depth consultation with staff and other university stakeholders. This plan was adopted by the Governing Authority in 2001 for a five year period, and outlines how the university aims to maximise DCU's distinctive values, based around the following characteristics:

- collaborative and networked
- accessible and open
- developmental and supportive
- innovative and flexible.

In the strategic plan the university also presents six academic themes or priorities for reaching its goals. The fact that it has been possible to agree on such priorities is in itself a very fine achievement: in traditional universities it is usually very difficult to identify and agree on such themes because discipline-based collegiality prevents prioritization. DCU's success in this may also be due to the fact that it has had a consistent vision from its earliest beginnings, as already mentioned. In the opinion of the EUA team, the choice of the six academic themes was also a wise one: they are interdisciplinary and problem based, covering all five Faculties at DCU in a variety of ways. The team also congratulates DCU for having included, along with the frequently addressed priorities in the fields of life sciences, engineering and business, some less typical themes involving communications, arts and culture, social development and, most importantly, education and learning.

These academic themes are designed to be interdisciplinary and operate on a matrix structure across the Faculties and Schools. New positions - theme leaders - are being created and filled to develop the work in these fields. These theme leaders will work together as a team and report to the Deputy President. They will join the Deans in the Academic Strategy Committee.

DCU is a specialised institution and wants to obtain a high national and international reputation in the fields of these themes. Prioritisation is therefore an important and necessary part of the university's strategy.

There would appear however to be some tension between DCU's work and reputation at national and international level, and its desire to contribute to local development. North Dublin has traditionally been a disadvantaged area and local participation rates in third-level education are low, particularly at universities. Local stakeholders would like to count on DCU as an interface on behalf of the North Dublin area. Of course, for DCU to act as the local university for the entire community, it would have to offer much the same array of courses as the other universities in Dublin, which makes no sense in a medium-sized city with so many other higher education providers. This would obviously also work against the specialisation which DCU is keen to achieve.

It is not easy to be a good regional university and at the same time to develop top class specialisations at national and international level. This dilemma, resulting from the success of DCU since its foundation, merits further in-depth discussion when developing the university's next strategic plan for the second five year period. This might also be the moment to consider developing a specific mission and vision for the university. As part of this process, DCU might also consider developing linkages with other avowed "urban universities" in both Europe and North America for the purpose of benchmarking and sharing best practices.

5. Student Issues

The admission of traditional students is obviously well organised in Ireland through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system. Although the right to choose its own students is one of the main elements of a university's autonomy, it is well recognised that national cooperation in this respect is necessary and often better than full individual autonomy. However, the EUA team considers that the systematic recruitment and admission of non-traditional and mature students needs a better organisational framework. DCU has so far been a leader in these fields but would also benefit from a more coherent national approach.

DCU is obviously very concerned about the decline in first preferences for its courses among incoming first year students, and the corresponding decline in the CAO point scores. This kind of change has however happened across Europe in similar ways to Ireland, especially in the various fields of engineering, and more recently in computing. There is currently a tendency across Europe for students to look for "softer" and less intensive science and arts subjects. DCU should therefore be aware that its current experience is part of a wider European trend, and it may be worth collectively exploring some of the broader issues linked to this phenomenon within a group of likeminded universities. The challenge at DCU is however compounded by the fact that 94% of its first-year students come straight from school and that the age cohorts of school leavers are now getting smaller and will continue to do so.

DCU has ambitious research objectives. In order to reach these it will need to increase research capacity. One important way of achieving this is to train greater numbers of young researchers. Such a move would also fit well into the emerging Irish strategy for a creating a knowledge economy. Ireland has changed radically over the last ten or fifteen years, but the numbers of PhD students and post doctoral researchers still remain low, drawing the attention of bodies such as the OECD. Part of the change in Ireland has been the increasing internationalisation of many aspects of economic, social and cultural life, and the universities too have played their part in this. But if Ireland and DCU are to develop as envisaged, this international component will need strengthening at DCU, in both quantity and quality.

The EUA team would therefore suggest some changes in the student profile at DCU:

- More taught masters students, aiming at higher levels of specialisation for professional purposes and at the re-orientation of graduates towards new higher-level qualifications and skills.
DCU currently has, in relative terms, the highest number of these students in Ireland, but this is still lower than in many other European countries;
- More Research Masters and PhD students for developing the research capacity and profile at DCU: the number of PhD students is generally low in Irish universities but especially low in DCU. One reason for this lies in the fact that the Business School, with over 2000 students, has less than thirty students in research based programmes. The situation at the School of Nursing is somewhat similar. The EUA team accepts that this is typical for these academic fields but nevertheless change is needed here also;
- In the future, adult education will become more and more important. DCU is already a key player in this field, with the National Distant Education Centre and other initiatives. One objective in "Leading Change" is to become the national leader in the provision of lifelong learning. For this to succeed, DCU will need further development of adult education and better integration of these initiatives into the "regular" educational programmes. A change in national policy regarding part-time students would also help encourage lifelong learning;
- More international students. Current numbers are already reasonably high but the possibilities for an English speaking society and university are excellent, both with respect to EU and non-EU students. This is also true for students from the developed as well as the developing world. DCU sees itself as a pioneer in promoting the international exchange of students.
For internationalisation, it is however also important that increasing numbers of DCU's Irish students undertake part of their studies in other countries.

The EUA team would like to note the important effort that the university is putting into the Access programme. This experience will certainly also prove relevant in preparing DCU for dealing with a more diverse student population, as will certainly be the case in the near future.

6. Teaching and Learning

The SER states that DCU has a "strong teaching and learning ethos". There are numerous indicators that the quality of teaching and learning is a priority concern at DCU which lead the EUA team to agree with this statement. Among these indicators, the team noted that, for example:

A Vice-Presidency for Learning Innovation has recently been established, along with Associate Deanships for Teaching and Learning in all Faculties. The appointment of a Head of Teaching and Learning, reporting to the Vice-President, was pending at the time of the EUA team's visits. A Learning Strategy Committee, not yet appointed at the time of the EUA visits, will report to the Academic Council and will submit matters to the Executive (via the Budget Committee) in relation to resourcing commitments. Teaching and Learning Committees are being created in each Faculty. The Faculty committees will be chaired by the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, who will also be members of the University's Learning Strategy Committee.

Programme Boards oversee the operation and monitor the quality of education in their respective programmes. Advisory Councils also exist through which external stakeholders can have input to quality improvements in certain programmes, e.g. in the Schools of Business and Communications. New programme proposals and major curriculum revisions are reviewed rigorously both internally and externally, according to a variety of significant criteria, before being authorized for implementation. These encompass the progressive stages of validation, accreditation, and approval. Periodic accreditation

reviews of programmes in certain professional fields are also carried out by external bodies. A traditional system of external examiners, similar to that in British and other Irish universities, ensures that course contents and assessment procedures are reviewed regularly.

DCU undertakes surveys across the entire university of student opinion about teaching and learning quality at the levels of schools, and individual modules, as well as student experience surveys. A process of "structured discussions" also exists, involving focus groups in which students are encouraged to share concerns and suggest improvements regarding the quality of teaching and learning. Informal feedback is also garnered from the supervisors of students on work experience placements; the work placement programme organised by the INTRA office is a feature of most DCU programmes and constitutes one of the university's distinctive strengths. The university also solicits formal feedback from recent graduates and, to a lesser extent, their employers.

A variety of support services exist for students to help improve their learning capabilities – including, in particular, an Access programme for those who do not meet the normal admissions criteria due to various disadvantages. In terms of staff development, a teaching resource centre exists, through which a variety of services and programmes are made available to staff who wish to improve their teaching performance in specific fields. These services include enabling options such as e.g. sabbatical leaves, conference attendance, study opportunities, and certain other incentives to encourage excellence in teaching, such as prizes and awards. A dedicated fund also exists through which various initiatives to improve teaching and learning may be supported on a competitive basis.

It is also worth noting that DCU was recently chosen to become a pilot institution in Ireland for the full implementation of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, key elements of the Bologna Process.

The above illustrations leave the EUA team in no doubt as to the seriousness with which DCU takes its teaching and learning responsibilities.

There are, however, several matters that have come to the team's attention which constitute potential concerns worthy of consideration as the University's current restructuring and strategic planning proceed. Among them are the following:

- While all of the examples listed above generate information and influence activity related to the quality of teaching and learning, it was not clear to the EUA team that these were well integrated with one another, or well articulated with the review process managed by the Quality Promotion Unit.

- Although the ultimate indicator of quality in teaching and learning is the performance of individual teachers, there does not seem to be a robust system of performance appraisal in place capable of assessing, rewarding and sanctioning behaviour in the instructional domain. This area also includes the possibility of teaching track promotions.

- The relationship between teaching and learning may need re-examining as part of the university's ongoing development. Many students apparently consider that there is too much formal contact teaching. The applied nature of many DCU programmes has traditionally required a heavy course load for students and relatively high numbers of contact hours compared to programmes offered in other universities. The Learning Strategy Committee at university level and the Teaching and Learning Committees at Faculty level can play a central role in assessing whether this should continue to be a characteristic of DCU and what alternative options might be suitable in the various fields.

- The complete modularisation of all study programmes is now underway at DCU. The EUA team would like strongly to endorse this move and encourage DCU to ensure that this is fully implemented without delay. This will be a crucial step for developing more flexible and interdisciplinary education, and will also prove important in facilitating non-traditional mature and international students, as well as the further development of adult education.

- Obtaining student feedback and opinions about the teaching and learning quality of overall programmes and individual modules currently depends on Faculties and Schools and is not mandatory. When such feedback is obtained, the methods for doing so are not applied consistently across the university's academic units. It would appear essential for DCU to have a more reliable and vigorous system in place across the institution to ensure such coherent feedback is obtained – at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels - and is used systematically to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This will require a certain amount of staff training in such feedback gathering techniques. It would also be desirable to provide greater and more regular feedback to the students themselves on the results of this work.

- There is widespread understanding that a strategic priority at DCU is to become rapidly recognized as a research-intensive university. The EUA team perceived a risk that the recognition of this objective may diminish the salience of the institution's teaching and learning mandate in the minds of some stakeholders, as well as among an important number of DCU staff.

- The team encountered two groups of students who were concerned that there seemed to be no administrative office at DCU to address their needs. These groups were:
    a. mature students who were not registered under the Access programme
    b. post-graduate, especially doctoral, students who were not international students
  Both of these groups are reportedly of priority interest to the University. Indeed, regarding the post-graduate group and DCU's desire to increase substantially the proportion of its students at these levels, it may be worthwhile to consider establishing the position of Dean of Graduate Studies as many universities in western countries, including some others in Ireland, have already done.

- The University's success in promoting the development of more interdisciplinary programmes will depend, to a considerable extent, on the effectiveness of the new Executive Dean functions currently being implemented. However, the EUA team was not convinced that the appointees to these positions had as yet been given adequate authority regarding the allocation of resources, or a sufficiently clear understanding of the roles they are expected to play, in order to exercise this responsibility effectively, especially in the teaching and learning arena. The recent creation of the Faculties must result in genuine value added, where the whole is greater and better than the sum of its respective parts. This will require proactive leadership, and not only responsive coordination.

- Excellence in teaching and learning depends to a considerable extent on state-of-the-art infrastructure, including facilities, equipment and materials. This is an area where the EUA team noted some shortcomings and deterioration in some locations visited on campus; these weaknesses will need to be adequately addressed if the University is effectively to deliver on its commitment to teaching and learning quality.

Notwithstanding these possible concerns raised for consideration, the team wishes to emphasize that in all its discussions with students, staff members, external stakeholders, etc., it encountered virtual unanimity in commitment to high-quality teaching and learning, satisfaction and indeed pride in the educational experience offered at DCU, and optimistic enthusiasm for its prospects of attracting excellent students in the future.

7. Research and Commercialisation

Research Strategy and Governance

DCU considers itself to be a research led university and adopted a strategy in the mid-1990s that has been producing impressive outcomes over the last five years. In fact, through the University Designated Research Centres Programme, DCU has promoted the creation of critical mass in chosen strategic areas. In this way the institution has positioned researchers and units to seize, with success, the opportunities created through the recent development of research funding in Ireland. This is the case concerning the governmental Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI), the Irish Research Councils, the Health Research Board and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), in the areas of ICT and Biotechnology.

A Research Committee of Academic Council is responsible for the development of research policy and strategy development, with the assistance of a Research Advisory Panel. This Panel has responsibility for allocating part of the annual internal DCU research budget, approximately   430,000 per year. The majority of the internal research budget, approximately   1,380,000, is allocated by the Research Committee.

The creation of the position of Vice-President for Research has allowed this strategy to be driven at the highest level and is a signal of the importance given to this sector of activity at DCU. The recent move to Faculty structures at DCU has also helped gain a better strategic grasp of research activity, facilitating synergies and rationalization. The introduction of the six cross-cutting academic themes through the strategic plan is also a new and demanding challenge for the governance of research. The on-going appointment of the theme leaders is especially important here and is intended to help ensure the relevance of research to the main strategic thrusts of the university. The need for these different layers to mesh well together calls for the careful attention of the leadership in order to ensure continued success in the years to come.

Research Organization

Research is organised in two types of centres at DCU, although obviously much research also takes place outside of any such centre:

- University Designated Research Centres may receive (through competitive bidding) funding from the DCU Research Advisory Panel which is responsible for assessing them and has the power to dissolve them if they are not meeting expectations.
- National Research Centres are the flagships for DCU's research. The successful development of a research strategy since 1995 has led to the financing of four National Research Centers. This is a recognition of the quality and high potential of the research developed at DCU.

All research centre staff and students must also be affiliated to a School. Research centres have their own budgets, up to 30% of which may come via the Faculties from the university. The organization of research in these centres and the creation of Faculties have brought additional complexity to the structure of the organization. This issue and the apparent lack of communication about the research strategy and ongoing developments of the Faculties are raising some concern among the academic community.

The sustainability of the research infrastructure is a matter of utmost importance at DCU, calling for adequate State and institutional resource policies, where overheads must be considered as an integral part of the research funding. This is a new concept in Ireland. The inclusion of overheads in SFI funded projects (30%) shows some understanding for this essential aspect of the financial organization of research, which should be shared by other agencies also. Overheads will allow the freeing up of other resources, thus allowing DCU to increase its discretionary budget for research. This funding can then be distributed to selected units in order to provide an incentive to bring in additional funding.

At a time when executive Deans and theme leaders are being selected and appointed, the preparation of a new strategic plan is also under way. This is an excellent opportunity to reinforce communications and develop a sense of ownership concerning all these innovative and challenging research developments.

Postgraduate Research Based Programmes

The development of the research base of any university is strongly dependent on its capacity to attract postgraduate research students at PhD level as well to involve postdoctoral fellows. In DCU the number of PhDs is low by international standards, and the structures for encouraging these students not fully developed. The EUA team was not surprised to see recommendations for an increase in MSc student numbers, both taught and research, in the quality review reports of some Schools. Post graduate research work has until now been dominated by individual activity and small projects, but with the desired growth in numbers and importance of this activity, it seems essential to introduce a more structured approach, where individuals and projects would be part of larger programmes, bringing together students for some taught modules but also in order to meet, stimulate and learn from each other. The EUA team was told of recent positive experiences in this respect in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Indeed, postgraduate research based structures and systems nationally do not appear to be very well organised. Clearer and more explicit structures and systems at national level would certainly be of benefit to DCU and probably to the other Irish universities also. The need to double the numbers of PhD students, highlighted in the OECD report as a national challenge, is an indication that this matter needs to be taken seriously. This development, however, may need the same level of forward looking policies for scholarships as those adopted for research infrastructure. The EUA team is aware that some work has started in this field and would encourage DCU and the other universities to ensure it is followed through.

Another issue raised and needing consideration by due authorities is the employment situation of researchers and research technicians. When the financial basis for developing research is being increased, as is the case in Ireland, the strategy and policies for human resources need to be pursued with the same determination and sense of priority. The development of a career track for research which the university is currently promoting should be commended and deserves appropriate support.

Research Commercialization

The recognized tradition in DCU of cooperation with industry has led to a number of innovative approaches aiming at stimulating knowledge transfer, including via spin-off companies. A campus company, Invent, has been founded with the mission to stimulate the commercialization of research and to assist researchers in the management of Intellectual Property Rights. The adoption of the "National Code of Practice for the Management of Intellectual Property from Public Funded Research" is an encouraging development in creating a transparent framework for progress in this area. The excellent facilities that Invent provides for developing knowledge based businesses and the support given to other technology transfer initiatives will certainly increase DCU's capacity to contribute to the development of a knowledge based economy. The team was pleased to note that entrepreneurship courses are already well embedded in the culture of the university. However it came as a surprise to learn that Invent has not been associated with the current procedures for quality reviews at Schools. It might be useful to ensure that, in the relevant cases, Invent systematically informs the QRP process relating to the work of the Schools concerning research commercialization, IPR, and related matters.

The network of relations with industrial partners which has resulted from the long standing placement of students is certainly one very valuable instrument for developing cooperation in research and related areas. DCU can build on this strong network of contacts. The university appears to be considered by

companies as willing to engage with industry, happy to collaborate and not trying to dictate the fields of research. This perception helps to facilitate a two-way relationship where the benefits are evident on both sides. Work placements and other contacts have led to master and PhD programmes with private partners. Companies have also given capital funding in return for priority access to equipment when needed. However, it was suggested during the team's visits that DCU's work in developing such relations would benefit from greater planning and setting of goals. This may be one area in which the new theme leaders could play an important role.

8. Governance and management

Governing bodies at the central level

The principal governing body at DCU is the Governing Authority (GA). The size of the GA was recently reduced to 26 members. The GA membership includes representatives of different categories of DCU staff, a number of external representatives, two representatives from the Students Union and one postgraduate student. The composition of the GA is defined in great detail in the 1997 Universities Act. However, the recent OECD report suggests a general reduction in size of such governing authorities at all Irish universities, and proposes a maximum of twenty members, a majority of which should be lay members, that is from outside the university. The EUA team agrees in principle with the OECD recommendation, although there were few signs at DCU that the current structure was unworkable.

The 1997 legislation also gives an overview of the GA's formal functions; as in other universities with such a body, these are essentially supervisory. It might prove useful for DCU to revisit these basic functions of the GA, since the EUA team learned that much time in GA meetings tended to be spent on rather operational matters. The GA external members whom the EUA team met were of the opinion that it would be more useful and productive to concentrate on strategic issues during meetings; they also welcomed the suggestions of the OECD report.

The internal governance structures at DCU consist of two strands: an executive and an Academic Council. The composition and business of the Academic Council is also laid down in the Universities Act and follows a traditional governance model. The organisational chart shows 21 committees at university level.

Given the size of DCU, the EUA team wonders whether this kind of governance with so many committees can really work effectively. This may also be one of the reasons why many members of staff consider that the university has become rather top heavy and unwieldy. Restructuring this system and reducing the number of committees could certainly be achieved even in the current legal framework.

Faculties and Schools

DCU has five recently created Faculties, covering a total of thirteen Schools. The Schools are larger than discipline based departments, which is an important aspect of DCU's identity and academic culture. A new organisational structure is currently being put into place, placing the real decision making responsibility as far down inside this structure as possible. This is being achieved through the establishment of the positions of Executive Dean with resource management responsibilities in each of the five newly defined Faculties. As a result, funding is moving away from Schools and towards Faculties. This is because there was a feeling that there had been too many cost centres to be efficient. This change has not been fully executed, and the Faculties therefore have not yet reached their potential in terms of effective and efficient academic management.

In order to facilitate the devolution of powers to the Executive Deans, human resources structures have also been streamlined. The EUA team understood that the role of the Human Resources Office will now be to focus on HR development issues while the Deans will assume a more managerial and operational role. The HR office will be there to support them in this task.

The SER states that "DCU is committed to developing radical and creative approaches to organisational and decision-making processes". The EUA team would like to encourage DCU to follow through with this idea and ensure these plans are implemented in all Faculties. It would appear that not all Faculties are as yet fully prepared for this.

In a relatively small university such as DCU, it is important to keep the organisational structure as flat as possible and to avoid making decisions at many different levels. The optimum would be decision making at two levels: the grass roots level as close as possible to the unit where the process takes place, then one at a more centralized level, i.e. at Faculty or University level. The EUA team observed many examples at DCU where decisions on one issue appeared to be needed from a multitude of different levels and bodies, resulting in very slow processes and ineffective management.

9. Finances

As in the other Irish universities, DCU's funding is based on a block grant and the funding of student fees by the State. The block grant is received as a lump sum, and the university can decide on how it uses this.

Based on the data provided, the EUA team estimates that 97% of DCU's current income, excluding research income, comes from the State. Recent cuts have proved that this cannot be relied on in the future. There is a fear that if fees are reintroduced, further cuts may be expected. The university is seeking to consolidate its future by attracting non-traditional and foreign students as well as by a drive for commercial funds.

Given the move to Faculty-level cost centres, the university is currently redesigning its budget allocation system, moving from a cost allocation system to an income system. Income targets are being established for Faculties, with a predicted surplus or deficit. The Faculty should then be free to manoeuvre within these targets. Concerns about the distribution of the budget between the central administration and Faculties were expressed in such terms that the EUA team would strongly suggest that this issue should be given close attention.

The external funding of research, based on national competition, has expanded rapidly since the late 1990s. It is important to repeat that there must be a well functioning overhead policy as part of this research funding, otherwise it will inevitably draw money away from the teaching and learning activities of the university.

10. Quality assurance

Background

The Universities Act from 1997 requires that all Irish universities must create an internal QA system. This law also lays down the basic framework for this system:

- the evaluations should be conducted at regular interval and not less than once in 10 years
- all Departments and, where appropriate Faculties, and any services provided by the university should be evaluated
- teaching, research and the provision of other services should be the subjects of evaluation.

DCU adopted this type of Quality Review process as a basis for statutory quality assurance in the year 2000. In adopting the national framework, DCU has chosen to evaluate only Schools and service units, which has made it possible to set a six year cycle for the reviews. This means an average of three schools and three units per year. This sounds very reasonable and is also a result of the rather low number of schools in DCU. Since the start of the review operations in 2000, eight schools and four service units have been reviewed.

Process

In DCU the Quality Review process is overseen by the Quality Promotion Committee, which is a subcommittee of University Executive. Members are nominated by the schools and units. The executive unit is the Quality Promotion Unit which has its own director and staff. This unit functions under the umbrella of EOLAS and reports to the President.

Although all universities operate under the same law and follow the same IUQB guidelines, there are also internal adaptations of the method. However the basic method, as a cyclical quality review, involves similar steps. The procedure is as follows:

- Self-assessment
- Visit by a peer review group
- Report by the peer review group with recommendations for improvements
- Development of an implementation plan
- Publication of the outcomes

In preparing for the self-assessment phase, the unit in question appoints a co-ordinating committee. The self-assessment takes about one year. The self-assessment reports are not published, since these are confidential to the unit and the peer review group.

The EUA team asked to see a number of SERs. These appeared to be well written documents going into considerable detail regarding the operations of the unit and the work of its staff. A noticeable feature was the size of these reports, some of which contained huge amounts of archive material, CVs, academic profiles etc. The team was worried that in some cases the essential analytical elements of a self-assessment might get lost in the accumulation of information regarding the unit. The EUA team would also encourage DCU to ensure that SERs are kept to a maximum length of 25-30 pages. Annexes can of course be added to this.

The Peer Review Groups (PRG) which come to DCU are composed of five members: three of these are external and two are internal. The Chair of the PRG is selected from among the external members of the group during the visit. One of the external members is from outside Ireland. One of the internal members is always a member of the QPC and acts as rapporteur for the group. The PRG produces a final report with recommendations for improvement.

Some concern was expressed about the standard composition of the PRG. While it is certainly useful to have both internal and external members of the group, especially during the first cycle of reviews, the EUA team learnt that more flexibility may be needed in assembling these groups. The choice of internal and external members can sometimes be problematical. Given DCU's size, as well as its distinctive profile in Ireland, it may on occasion be better for more of the PRG members to come either from outside DCU or from outside the country. The expertise available locally or nationally may not always be suitable.

The PRG report then goes to the Executive to prepare a university response, which is addressed to the Governing Authority. Recommendations emanating from the PRG report should be treated at a local level, School level, Faculty level and institutional level. The Executive response establishes what issues should be

addressed, at which level and by whom. The whole process, following the finalisation of the PRG report, includes some six to eight different steps and takes between four to ten months.

The PRG report and the Executive response both go to the Governing Authority. This body has been known to return the university's response if it is felt that the issues have not been fully addressed. For example, the need for refurbishment emerged strongly in the School of Communications' report but the Executive did not address this in its response. The Governing Authority returned the response.

Other quality monitoring procedures

In addition to this statutory periodical quality review process there also exist a number of other mechanisms for quality assurance in the university. These include:

- The Student Experience Survey and Student Opinion of Teaching are centrally operated on a rolling basis within DCU
- Employers feedback through work placement (INTRA)
- Reviews of the Research Centres conducted by the Research Advisory Panel
- Individual review of teachers, schools and programme boards outside of the formal processes
- Internal accreditation and validation of all new programmes
- External accreditation of certain programmes by the relevant professional bodies on a regular basis
- External examiners who look at the teaching programmes and assessment procedures
- Various internal competitive funding opportunities to reward excellence

These and other mechanisms are referred to in the SER. However, during the QRP within units, it may be useful to make the links between the process and these other mechanisms more explicit, as part of a general move towards an overall quality culture at DCU.

Observations on the quality review process

The QRP system at DCU enjoys a high level of constructive acceptance among the university community. The President has encouraged a healthy and open climate for the quality reviews and would like the units to use the exercise to engage in frank assessment, as part of developing a quality culture at DCU. The process is generally considered effective, with many important benefits to be obtained, especially during the self-assessment period. The work of the Quality Promotion Unit was universally praised by those whom the EUA team met, and the entire process was considered to be well managed.

The EUA team considers that the QRP in DCU is well planned and thoroughly executed. DCU has made a wise choice in using this method to review the basic units, Schools and service units. The relatively small number of units makes it possible to have a shorter -interval between reviews than some other Irish universities. However, six years is still too long a time to wait to comment on a system which effects a unit's daily operations, or for a follow-up for any particular unit, and evidence is lacking regarding the university-wide use of results.

It is also difficult for the EUA team to understand why the QR process at each unit takes such a long time – even 18 to 24 months in total. In the team's opinion, the time for self-assessment is far too long, and the university process following the delivery of the PRG report is very complicated, going through several committees and likewise taking many months. The length of the process could mean that the initial self-evaluation work and the quality improvement plans proposed by the Schools are out of date by the time the university has responded.

DCU staff from the reviewed units felt the PRG reports to be critical in a constructive sense, and helpful in seeing how problems could be resolved. The role of the international reviewers was seen as very important in ensuring the validity of the process. The heavy workload was often mentioned but the process itself is clearly respected. The undergraduate students are however generally unaware of it; when they do notice something they often confuse the QRP with course evaluations and feed-back.

Expectations resulting from the process are therefore high. Many improvements have been proposed as a result of the QRP which did not require any funding; very often, these improvements have been implemented. However, many units are disappointed because the resource allocation resulting from the QRP has not followed as expected, and the outcomes have not influenced subsequent budget allocations. This may be due to recent budgetary cuts and the difficult overall financial situation. Although DCU has built up a fund to address the issues emerging from the reports, this fund is very small. It has nevertheless brought some satisfaction. However, the EUA team heard several times that it was difficult for units to say that as a result of the QRP they received this or that investment, and there was a general feeling among many members of staff that the overall results emerging from the implementation phase were rather minimal. There is therefore a major risk of demotivation that could compromise the whole approach. The exercise could then be perceived as a paper one and nothing more.

Some dissatisfaction was also expressed at the response by senior management to the quality reviews. This was sometimes seen by the units as inadequate. There is concern that by just focusing on Schools, the review processes might not address the changes that are really needed. Senior management must ensure that it has an overview of the QRP outcomes and prioritise accordingly, in order to enable the university to learn collectively from the review cycle and draw lessons. No regular analysis of the results of the QRP would appear to be made at university level, although such an analysis should be important for the work of the Quality Promotion Committee, the Academic Council and the Governing Authority.

Thus a better management of expectations among staff is needed, as well as a more explicit link by the university executive between the QRP outcomes and strategic management.

Likewise, although the recently established research centres may need their own QA processes, with slight variations in procedure because of the external financial and other inputs, explicit links between the various forms of QA at DCU should be strengthened.

Finally, in seeking to establish a quality culture at DCU, care must be taken to ensure that there is not an over-emphasis in reviews on prescribed procedures and established structures to promote quality, at the expense of developing a responsive capacity to facilitate timely change as opportunities, needs, and priorities arise. The danger of concentrating on quality assurance at the expense of promoting quality improvement must be foreseen and avoided.

Suggestions for the future

Once the first full round of reviews is over, which is currently foreseen for 2006-7, there will be plenty of scope for discussing the future of this process. However, based on its observations so far, the EUA team would like, at this early stage, to suggest the following changes for the second round of the QRP at DCU:

- During the second round, the SER and PRG reports of the first round should serve as good background documents, so that the second round could be seen as a follow-up in those cases where the unit is still working in more or less the same structure and context;
- The methodology should be also made lighter, more flexible and less time consuming. There is no reason to spend a whole year on the self-assessment. This gives a wrong signal to staff since the

review should be part of a normal planning process and not a heroic event to be experienced once or twice in a lifetime. Shortening the process can also be achieved by using the university database more effectively, with agreed performance indicators as a basis for the evaluation. The SERs should be shorter and more analytical, based on SWOT analyses;

- The PRG report should initially go to the Dean, in addition to the Head of School and President as is currently the case. The Dean should then have the responsibility to discuss it in the Faculty executive board and to link the results to the plans of the respective Faculty through which the implementation should happen. In addition, the Dean should be linked to the process during the planning period also. Both these suggestions could help shorten the reporting phase, thus rendering it more effective and useful.

- The follow-up to the quality improvement plans appears generally to be inconsistent. The team understood that as one measure to improve this, it has already been decided that quality improvement plans will be discussed directly between the head of unit and the executive. This is a good proposal. It may also be useful for presentations on quality improvement implementation to be made to the executive after a fixed period, and for an overview of quality improvement activities to be presented to the Governing Authority on a regular basis.

- The interval between reviews should be shortened so that it corresponds to the period of strategic planning, i.e. four or five years. In this way the outcomes can be more closely related to other developments across the university.

11. Strategic Planning and Quality Review

The present strategic plan "Leading Change" is the result of a very inclusive process and there is a high level of ownership among the university community. The EUA team felt however that the plan was rather aspirational and was struck by the slow implementation of the strategy. Elements have been introduced but not executed completely, and along the way a number of variations have been accepted. A common comment to the team's questions about the status of the reforms and changes was that things were "ongoing". These situations cause uncertainty among staff, which again can feed many kinds of comments about hierarchy, poor communications etc. The implementation of the plan is now complicated by the preparatory phase for a new strategic plan.

The link between the QRP, the executive and the strategic plan was not clear to the EUA team. It did not appear that the quality process was aligned with the university strategic processes. In the opinion of the team, quality should be pivotal to the strategic planning exercise. One potential link could be through the growing importance of the Faculties and the new powers of the executive Deans. The QRP reports should in any case go to the Deans as part of the Executive. The team understood that in future the Faculty boards will also receive the results and recommendations emerging from the QRP process and that through the Faculty these should be linked with the institutional strategic plans. The new role of the Deans will give them the responsibility to allocate resources and the power to influence the implementation of recommendations.

However, the reform of the internal managing structure linked to "Leading Change" is also underway but has not yet been implemented completely. The roles of the Executive Deans versus the roles of the heads of School and theme leaders need to be clarified. Deans, heads of School and theme leaders will have to work together on strategic planning, but their respective responsibilities should be clear, as well as their respective authority over resource allocations. For the Faculties to achieve their essential objectives it will be crucial to ensure the new role of the Deans is clearly defined for all involved, especially so with the concurrent introduction of theme leaders into DCU's organisational structure. Consequently, the team was pleased to learn of plans to arrange some professional development workshop experiences for the executive Deans.

Vertical and horizontal communications at DCU have been identified by the university as areas where improvement is needed. It is clear that communication on planning is not fully shared among DCU staff. The President indicated that steps had already been taken to remedy this.

For the purposes of promoting and assisting strategic planning at institutional level, the EUA team would like to suggest an additional way to proceed which may also produce interesting results. This would be to identify university-wide issues for review and not only units. Experience already exists at DCU of this kind of sectoral review, since a number of the university-wide services have already been evaluated. This model could be used more widely when needed for strategic purposes, for instance to review teaching methods, PhD programmes, etc. across the whole university.

It is important not to forget that, as already mentioned, there are plenty of other quality assurance and quality monitoring processes going on continuously at DCU. They are usually not as explicit and as well structured as the statutory quality review process, but they are also most important for safeguarding the quality of the university processes and important also for ongoing incremental improvement. These other methods also need regular attention and development.

12. Recommendations

In terms of mission:

- Given DCU's recent rapid development and the growth in its range of activities, use the next strategic planning phase to develop an explicit mission statement, outlining succinctly what the university is trying to do;

- As part of DCU's ongoing development and also in response to the changing nature and needs of Irish society, broader the student profile further to include greater numbers of post-graduate, international, non-traditional and mature students;

In terms of teaching and learning:

- Implement fully the ongoing modularisation of all study programmes at DCU;

- Put in place a more reliable and vigorous student feedback system, so that the quality of all courses and modules is monitored and that this is used systematically to improve the quality of teaching and learning;

- Re-examine the relationship between teaching and learning in DCU's programmes, so that this fits well with the desired learning outcomes of each programme;

- Explore available options for implementing a robust system of performance appraisal, capable of assessing, rewarding and sanctioning staff teaching performance;

In terms of research:

- Build up more postgraduate research-based programmes, in line with DCU's own strategic priorities;

- Examine possible strategies for developing more systematic research links with DCU's extensive network of industrial and other partners;

In terms of quality assurance:

- Strengthen the explicit links between the various forms of quality assurance at DCU, as part of the university's ongoing development of a quality culture;

- Align the quality review process with the university's strategic processes;

- INVENT should systematically inform the quality review process of relevant Schools concerning research commercialization, IPR, and related matters;

- Adopt a flexible approach when putting together peer review teams, in order to ensure that the collective expertise matches DCU's strategic needs

- Ensure that the length of time allocated to the self-assessment phase is kept as short as usefully possible. The same applies in preparing the official university response to the peer review group's report;

- Apply strict limits of 25-30 pages, excluding annexes, to the length of self-evaluation reports;

- Make more systematic and effective use of the university's database. This will also help reduce the length of time needed to compile reports;

- Reduce the overall length of the quality review cycle to match that of the strategic planning cycle. Six years is too long. Extra reviews can comfortably be fitted in each year to make this possible;

- Use relevant reports from the first round of quality review as good background documents for the second round, to ensure that this builds on the previous outcomes;

- Identify university-wide issues for review which could contribute to the ongoing development of quality at DCU;

- Put in place mechanisms to ensure undergraduate students are more aware of the quality assurance process and contribute to this;

In terms of management and governance:

- Develop a more explicit link between the quality review outcomes and strategic management;

- Ensure staff expectations regarding the quality review process are more realistic and long-term;

- Clarify the respective roles of the executive Deans, the heads of School and the theme leaders;

- Ensure that peer review group reports also go to the relevant Dean, who should then have the responsibility to oversee implementation;

- Linked to this, develop further mechanisms to ensure a more consistent follow-up to the quality improvement plans across the university;

- Identify possibilities to simplify decision-making processes, aiming for decisions on any one topic to be made at two levels only.

Envoi

The EUA team wishes to thank DCU once again for the excellent arrangements provided for the review team. It was a pleasure to be in Dublin and to explore the strategic lines of the university and its quality assurance system with staff, students, and external stakeholders. This review has taken place during a rather turbulent time for Irish higher education, with a number of other important initiatives also underway. The team trusts that DCU will find its comments and suggestions helpful, and wishes this young and vigorous university all the best for the next stage of its development.

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(November 2004)

Table of Contents

Part I   Introduction

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) to review the Quality Assurance system in Irish universities. The review was structured to be in accordance with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the HEA concerning quality assurance under the Irish Universities Act 1997. Under this Act, the Irish universities are required to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years".

For this purpose EUA has been engaged to undertake this review, by HEA and all the seven Irish universities represented by the IUQB, with assistance of experts from Europe, the U.S., and Canada. The review is designed to ensure that the university system and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from these comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts. The procedures and the processes in place in Irish universities can be reviewed against best practice internationally. The reviews were coordinated during the calendar year 2004, following the terms of reference and using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish review.

The EUA Institutional Review Programme

The European University Association (EUA; formerly CRE) decided in 1993 to offer its member universities the possibility of being reviewed in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses in quality management. The Institutional Review Programme started in 1994. Since then, the main aim of this activity has been to contribute to developing the universities' capacity for change and to assist the universities in improving institutional management in order to adapt to their evolving environment. This programme has contributed to establishment of the strong international reputation EUA has in quality assurance by having conducted reviews in more than 130 universities in 35 countries during the past 10 years (mostly in Europe but also in Latin America and South Africa).

In the Institutional Review process, EUA adopts a dynamic methodological approach to evaluation. It focuses on the universities' capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring, and strives to determine whether the preconditions are in place to make each and every institution more adaptable and responsive to the changing higher education environment at the local, national, European and international levels. Emphasis is placed on the university's self-evaluation to help it understand its strengths and weaknesses. In the long-term perspective, the EUA hopes to contribute to the promotion of a quality culture among its member universities, and to disseminate examples of effective strategic management among European universities. The EUA does not presume to provide a university with a blueprint for its development; rather, the review process is a consultative and supportive one.

The Review Team

This EUA Review Team was commissioned to do an Institutional Review at the National University of Ireland Galway, henceforth referred to as NUI Galway.

The Review Team for the NUI Galway consisted of Professor Luc E. Weber, former rector of Geneva University (Schweiz), chair, Professor Tove Bull, former rector of Tromsö University (Norway), Professor Robert Glidden, president emeritus of Ohio University (USA), members, and Senior Lecturer, Dr., Airi Rovio-Johansson, Göteborg University (Sweden) as Secretary. The preliminary visit took place May 26-27, 2004, and the main visit was on November 2-4, 2004. Unfortunately, Professor Tove Bull could not take part in the main visit.

A short summary of the working method

During the two visits, the Review Team met during those visits the President, Dr. Iognáid G. O'Muircheartaigh, the Vice-Presidents, the Registrar and Deputy-President, the University Management Team (UMT) and the liaison person, Professor Jim Gosling. The Team also met the Self Evaluation Steering Committee (SESC), representatives of the Deans and Department Heads of the Faculties visited, representatives of the University Council, the Governing Authority, University Committees, Research Centres, external stakeholders, academics, staff and groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as representatives for the Student Unions.

During the preliminary visit the Review Team met representatives of the Faculty of Commerce, Faculty of Science, Arts Faculty, and National Centre for Biomedical Engineering Science. During the main visit the Review Team met representatives of the Faculty of Law, Engineering Faculty, and Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Governing Authority, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), Quality Office, Academy for Irish Medium Studies, James Hardiman Library, Adult and Continuing Education, and representatives of the Student Union.

The Review Team appreciated that both visits were very well organised and wishes to underline the good working relationship between the President and the organizing team. The Review Team wants to thank the President and his teams for the hospitality of NUI Galway.

The Self Evaluation Report (NUI Galway, 2004a) gave an excellent general overview on NUI Galway. At the end of the preliminary visit the Review Team asked for supplementary information for the main visit, regarding the demographics of NUI Galway students, academics and administrative staff. Further, the Review Team asked for an overview of allocated research money in different faculties and research centres and of examples illustrating the concept of a "Student-Centred University," examples of actions taken after Quality reviews and effects of Quality reviews. The Additional Information requested (NUI Galway, 2004d) was also excellent and gave the EUA Review Team a deeper understanding of NUI Galway.

The Review Team identified some areas where constraints of varying complexity are apparent and need attention from the management of NUI Galway. Many initiatives have already been taken to address these constraints.

After this introduction, the second part of the report consists of an analysis of the context, the mission statement, and the constraints under which NUI Galway has to operate. Then, the opportunities and the challenges are identified for NUI Galway. The third part of this report presents recommendations from the EUA Experts with specific focus on the Quality Review System of NUI Galway.

Part II The National University Of Ireland Galway

A The institutional context

General

By the Universities Act, 1997, the former University College Galway was reconstituted as a University, named the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway. Together with NUI Dublin, NUI Cork, and NUI Maynooth, NUI Galway is a constituent part of the National University of Ireland (NUI Galway, 2004a).

The Irish tertiary education system seems to have the same characteristics as most public universities in the international higher education sector such as scarce resources due to changing priorities for public expenditures, higher demand for access to tertiary education, higher demand of more economically independent and socially responsive education and research, pressure to improve quality in education and research, improved efficiency and output of graduates, and a demand for more individual and independent technology-supported learning opportunities.

Quality assurance procedures for the Irish universities were introduced by the Universities Act, 1997. The Governing Authority of each institution has the responsibility for these procedures, which are aimed at improving the quality of education and related services.

In a rapidly changing economic environment there is certainly a need of more autonomous and independent institutions as in most European countries, in order to develop strategic plans, take actions and meet future requirements and challenges (Universities Act, 1997, Part III, 12-14). However, Ireland also has to tackle the disparities of economic activities, educational attainment and personal wealth among Irish regions as well as the critical factors in achieving a knowledge-based society with a high capacity for innovation. Irish tertiary institutions must also play an important role in attaining a knowledge society by investing in key disciplinary areas as well as in major interdisciplinary research projects.

The aspiration of further expanding participation in the higher education system, the demand to re-energise life-long learning and increase the proportion of part-time students is recognized by the Irish tertiary education system, and these are problems that need to be solved in the near future (Universities Act 1997). The entry rate in 2002 to Irish tertiary courses reached 57% of the age cohort as compared to the OECD-mean of 67% (OECD EAG, Indicator C2.1, Table 3). Although the Irish expansion rate is higher than the European average for graduates in science and technology, this expansion has taken place almost entirely at the 18- to- 21-year-old level. The aspiration of further expansion of participation in the tertiary education system has to be a long-term investment in a recruitment policy that focuses, not only on students from the middle class, but also on lower socio-economic groups due to the societal aims of equity and social welfare.

In terms of resources

In most European countries, as in Ireland, the government imposes restrictions on the operation of the universities, which affect negatively teaching, research, and services in the universities. NUI Galway has an inadequate budget to meet the internal needs of the university and of the society. There has been a reduction of resources in recent years ranging from 5% to 7%. The Government's allocation of resources to Irish tertiary education lacks transparency. Among the effects of that, the Review Team noticed that NUI Galway has a remarkably high staff/student ratio (for instance, in the Faculty of Law), as well as the deferred maintenance of aging buildings.

The Irish government must invest more in tertiary education and in research if they are to keep these as key drivers for the Irish economy. So far, the level of investment in Ireland is currently below the Lisbon target of 3%, partly due to the low level of industrial investment in research and development.

The continuously increasing number of students has affected the resources for research and undergraduate and postgraduate education. Medical education at NUI Galway, especially, is seriously under-funded, not only compared to most European countries but also in comparison with some medical faculties in Ireland. The scarce finances of NUI Galway require that priorities be set in education and in research. Out of the block grant from Government, 70% is used for salaries. The lack of multi-annual funding from Government sources is a central problem that must be solved to enable long-term strategic planning for research and teaching.

In terms of teaching

The Review Team acknowledges that NUI Galway has an extensive Quality Assurance System of academic activities, which gives regular feedback to the departments, academics and the faculty deans on academic activities. Due to that and the current EUA Review, important information has been collected regarding teaching and student performance related to faculties, programmes, and student outcomes (NUI Galway, 2004b). The Review Team also acknowledges that NUI Galway has introduced an Award Programme for Excellent Teaching, which will recognize publicly and reward the achievements of four teachers each year.

The students the Review Team met are proud of being students at NUI Galway. NUI Galway attracts a larger proportion of students from the whole of Ireland than other universities (NUI Galway, 2004d) and it may have the highest proportion of students aged 18 years and under in Ireland. In the year 2002, 56.3% of the students were aged 20 or younger (NUI Galway, 2004a). The retention rate of students is among the highest in Ireland. In spite of that, students are in need of tutorials due to the heavy reliance on large-scale lectures during first and second year of undergraduate studies, in which the very large numbers of students makes it impossible for questions to be put to the lecturer. The high student-staff ratio is a serious constraint for tutorials, small group teaching, and many other activities related to teaching and student learning.

The Review Team observed that there are too few course books and computers in the Library and that there is a need for more space and longer opening hours. When a group of students all have to solve the same problem or write an essay on the same topic, they must queue for books and computers. The insufficient number of computers available for students means that they have to queue to get one and some of the equipment is too old. According to some undergraduate and post-graduate students, there is a lack of information provided to new post-graduates and adult students about the university and particularly about student services available at NUI Galway.

Course evaluations by students are not mandatory at NUI Galway, and some students in their fourth year said that they have never heard about such evaluations and have never been asked to complete a course evaluation. This means that students' experiences are not systematically collected and that these experiences are not an integral part of the Quality Reviews. As a consequence, the students' experiences are not taken into account in the departments' strategic plans. The Review Team noticed the relatively weak position students have in influencing their learning and teaching facilities (NUI Galway, 2004b, p. 11).

Notwithstanding, NUI Galway has committed itself to enhance student learning as a top priority, by promoting teaching excellence. As has been mentioned, new steps are being taken to highlight and emphasize the strategic shift from teaching to learning strategies (NUI Galway, 2004b, p. 18). The Review Team acknowledges the services of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT). The CELT started in 2003 and so far the services offered to academics of the institution have been successful in obtaining the desired objectives. CELT needs the resources and the support of the management to succeed in the development of a Quality Improvement Culture at NUI Galway.

In terms of research

NUI Galway wants to further strengthen its research reputation and ethos and to develop world class research programmes according to the Strategic Plan, the Academic Plan the Self Evaluation Report of NUI Galway (NUI Galway, 2004a-c). "The University will continue to foster a thriving, creative and inclusive environment which attracts world-class researchers and students of the highest calibre, is properly resourced and structured, sustains and rewards excellence, and responds dynamically to cultural, socio-economic and technological priorities prevailing and foreseen" (NUI Galway 2004c, p. 12). This means a research-intensive university of high international standing and also that new research bodies such as Research Centres and Research Institutes will be integrated in the existing academic structures of the organisation, and that individual, collaborative and interdisciplinary research will be encouraged (NUI Galway, 2004b, p. 11).

These aims seem to be aspirations for the time being, but nevertheless, the aim is to cultivate the relationships between research and programmes of learning in order to achieve a balance between research and teaching. However, the Review Team noticed that there is a lack of time among academics to conduct research due to the number of teaching hours, as well as the increasing administrative burden.

In terms of organization

NUI Galway has a Governing Authority and an Academic Council, both chaired by the President. A University Management Team (UMT) acts as an executive group and consists of the President, the Registrar, the Vice Presidents for Research, for Strategic Initiatives and Development, for Student Services & Human Resources and for Physical Resources, the Bursar and the Secretary (NUI Galway, 2004a, Appendix 1).

The Governing Authority, regulated through the Universities Act 1997, has the Strategic Plan on its agenda as a standing item, and the responsibility for procedures to improve quality of education and related services. This body consists of 14 external members out of a total of 38. The Review Team observed that this is an active body with about ten committees and a number of subcommittees. However, to the Review Team it seems unusual and unnecessary that members of a policy-making body also participate in operational matters such as preparing items in committees or other such activities that would seem to be the province of the University Management Team.

Currently there are two parallel steering systems at NUI Galway which have different aims and working methods: a. collegial system: working out policies for the university ruled by the Faculties and the academic departments, and b. an executive administrative system ruled by the University Management Team. The Review Team heard several times the opinion from academics that the resource allocation system, primarily ruled by the executive administrative system of the University, is not transparent for departments and faculties.

The deans' positions, roles, duties and responsibilities should be recognized in the organisation of NUI Galway and the deans as a group should be more systematically involved in the decision process. This group of academics lacks formal recognition, e.g., organization as a committee or council, for discussions and decisions of issues related to research and education.

Quality Assurance Procedures and Quality Audits

According to the department heads, Quality Audit reviewers have been carefully selected. However, some of the auditors have acted as advocates for their discipline rather than considering the needs and best interests of the University as a whole. Reports from audits have resulted many times in different interpretations. The Review Team observed in several departments that the Quality Reviews and Quality Audits did not always

result in useful recommendations. In spite of that, the preparations and the work related to the Self-Assessment Report were appreciated. Recommendations given were not always realistic and related to existing resources, for instance, recommendations for appointment of new positions and purchase of expensive equipment. Also several academics suggested that evaluation of leadership should be integrated in the Quality Review Process and that the guidelines for auditors should be clarified to reflect the changes of the academic review procedures since the process began in 1996 (NUI Galway, 2004a, p. 15; Browne et al., 2004, p. 10).

The Review Team acknowledges the work done by the Quality Office since the 1996, and took notice that 52 academic departments, 12 academic programmes, one research centre and three faculties have been reviewed (Browne et al., 2004, p. 5). The second review cycle started in 2003/2004. Regarding the overall satisfaction level of all respondents (total of 110 staff) related to these academic reviews, the Review Team observed that the satisfaction level varies considerably according to a survey carried out two years ago in the academic departments reviewed in 2000-01 and 2001-02. Each member of administrative, academic and technical staff in the relevant departments was asked as to their degree of satisfaction with responses to the review process by their department (66% satisfied), by their faculty (22%) and by the university management (14%). The falling levels of satisfaction are "dramatic" and alarming (NUI Galway, 2004a, p. 16-17; Appendix J). The risk of "evaluation fatigue" among academics and staff in combination with dissatisfaction about the response to recommendations deserves urgent considerations. As mentioned above, the students' role and participations in the quality assurance processes is only one among several critical factors which have to be taken into account in the long-term work of restructuring the academic review procedures.

The Review Team also asked questions about the current EUA Review. It was pointed out to the Review Team by some of the deans that the EUA Self-Evaluation process was not threatening but it was rather challenging. Among academics, most appreciated the EUA Self-Evaluation process. The possibility of identifying department and interdisciplinary problems and of reorganizing academic activities, some of them between different faculties, were highly appreciated as well as the resulting comprehensive view of all the departments' activities at NUI Galway.

B   Mission, opportunities and challenges

Mission

The Review Team congratulates NUI Galway for its Mission, impressive key goals and the strategic priorities. The Review Team also want to acknowledge the Academic Plan, a commitment to implementation of the aims and the strategic priority themes (NUI Galway, 2004b, p. 11; NUI Galway, 2004c, p. 7).

The aims and aspirations of the Strategic Plan of NUI Galway, 2003-2008, are long-term. NUI Galway is committed to excellence in both education and research, and to the enhancement of the learning experience of each of its students. NUI Galway commits itself to continue to disseminate its knowledge and expertise to the City of Galway and the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region.

The rapidity of changes in Irish society and in Irish higher education system, and the internationalisation of higher education create a competitive environment for the institution. Nevertheless, NUI Galway commits itself to offering an education which has as one of its aims to respond to the needs of the Irish society and the region, to offer opportunities for Adult Learning and Lifelong Learning for mature students, and to respond to the current and future needs of the Irish society and the Gaeltacht region.

The EU has the ambition to create more transparent Higher Education and Research areas, in which international alliances and networks of excellence will play an important role, in an environment that recognizes an increasing importance of interdisciplinary research and education. Inadequate funding is an

obstacle in the endeavour to meet international competition among Irish research universities, in spite of the fact that Ireland has adopted the Lisbon objectives of devoting 3% of GNP to research. The increasing costs of research and of attracting top researchers in different fields are major challenges to confront in the near future for all Irish universities, and in particular for NUI Galway.

On the national level, NUI Galway must join other universities in advocating a more appropriate national policy for the funding of Irish medical education as well as a policy regarding the timing of budget allocations from the government. The extension of academic programmes and research, and growth and diversity of the student body can only be realised if the University Management Team can manage to attract excellent teachers and researchers in spite of reward systems that are limited by the rules of the Irish Civil Servant system. It is also imperative that the University act to repair its aging campus buildings and expand the physical facilities of the campus, including the Library. The Management of NUI Galway must act aggressively to realise the HEA-prioritised projects of capital funding (HEA, 2004, p. 41 and 46). The expansion of the Library and other physical facilities of the campus are required to meet the future requirements of students, academics and staff and to satisfy the mission and agreed goals of the University. It will also be necessary to confront with the constraints of the national transportation infrastructure due to NUI Galway's geographical location.

Opportunities

NUI Galway has a 150-year-old reputation and well established roles in the western and north western Gaeltacht regions. Its quasi-monopoly position in the west of Ireland and the BMW region affords an integrative culture with a specific focus on the Irish language through the newly established Academy of Irish Medium Studies. NUI Galway can be a model university for regional and community leadership as well as a strong national contributor in some disciplines. By means of thoughtful planning of research priorities NUI Galway could also be a prominent research university. Then, by realising its student-centred aspirations and the national goals for Life Long Learning, the University could expand its undergraduate programmes for Irish, European and overseas students and its programmes for Adult and Continuing Education. Student-recruitment policy, as a long-term strategy, should focus on Irish students primarily but also on European, non-European and overseas students in order to develop an outstanding multicultural learning environment in alignment with the University's mission statement.   The academics of NUI Galway demonstrate high accomplishment based on their collegiality, good-will and sense of ownership. They also have shown a high acceptance of Quality Audits in spite of the frequency of the reviews and of accreditation processes.

The Review Team acknowledges the actions taken by the University Management Team of NUI Galway in starting a gradual restructuring of the university organisation by developing larger units in the University. This is appropriate, considering that the majority of academic departments have fewer than 10 members. The restructuring process includes incentives such as increased administrative support and greater resources for better laboratories. It will probably result in new academic synergies and possibilities, and more time for teaching and research due to new relationships among disciplines, academics and units. Revitalization of teaching and research at the University is evident.

The establishment of a European Research Community (ERC) and a changing European paradigm for financing regional development might bring new possibilities for participation in international research networks, a prerequisite for being successful as a research university.

Challenges

The competitiveness in the higher education arena has become much stronger from a national and an international perspective. The challenges NUI Galway faces are to deal with insufficient financial support from the government for education and research as well as the unpredictability of annual budgets and the lack of multi-annual budgets.

The competition from other Irish universities must be faced, and at the same time the University must recruit first-rate teachers and researchers despite of the constraints of the Universities Act of 1929. From an international perspective of higher education, it is important for every European university to become appropriately entrepreneurial in order to raise revenue to support new academic initiatives.

Part III   Recommendations

With regard to the analysis of the strengths, opportunities and challenges of NUI Galway, the Review Team strongly recommends the following:

- That NUI Galway develop advocacy strategies for the support of tertiary education in Ireland as well as every possible means to assure the implementation of the HEA's plan, dated 8 September 2004, the *Review and Prioritisation of Capital Projects in the Higher Education Sector*.

- The review of the internal organisational structure must continue melding smaller units into larger ones.

- The review of the size, role and structure of the Governing Authority as well as the Academic Council must continue in spite of their regulation in the Universities Act of 1997 which have to be questioned.

- It is recommended that a formal Council of Deans be established, with a clear statement of roles and authority for both the Council and the individual deans.

- In terms of the institutional resource allocation system, its rationale, its priorities, and its criteria, there is a great need for more transparency for faculties and departments.

- In terms of internationalisation, it is recommended that the University broaden its concept from just recruiting overseas students to developing international and European understandings and opportunities.

- In order to serve a growing student body, it is recommended that NUI Galway establish an institutional research office with thorough planning for role and function, so that the vital data are collected and analyzed.

- It is recommended that NUI Galway address the contradiction between its aspiration of being a student-centred university and the students' complaints about large classes, too little space, too few computers and too few student services.

- In terms of teaching, the Review Team observed that the evaluation of courses was not mandatory at NUI Galway. Therefore it is recommended that systematic evaluations of all courses be introduced immediately. However, these evaluations must be kept confidential and not made public. The deans and department heads should assume the responsibility for the follow-up of course evaluations. Students should be informed of actions taken as a result of the evaluations, e.g. inform the new

course group of comments from the former students and tell them about department actions taken as a result of the former evaluation.

The academics' experiences of Quality Assurance procedures and Accreditation processes seem to be predominantly positive, especially the work related to the Self Assessment Report. Colleagues worked on issues related to teaching and the development of academic activities and experienced satisfaction of working for a joint purpose. The visits of the Quality Audit and accreditation groups were appreciated. The recommendations from the Quality Audits were appreciated in some cases but a disappointment in many cases. Injunctions on the department level were executed, but injunctions related to faculty and University level were not accomplished in most cases. The timelines for follow-ups should be more specific.

- The Review Team strongly recommends that the Guidelines for the Quality Assurance procedures should emphasize that recommendations presented by the Quality Audit should be sensitive to resource constraints (NUI Galways, 2004a).

- To avoid "review fatigue" and reduce the review burden, it is recommended that when possible the University combine Quality Audits with Accreditation processes.

- And finally, it is recommended to extend the time schedules of quality audits to 7 years with the provision that a shorter term might be required in some instances.

Envoi

The Team wants to extend special thanks to the President, Dr. Iognaid O'Muircheartaigh, the Vice-Presidents, the Registrar and Deputy-President, the University Management Team (UMT) and the executive officers for their time and attention. The Review Team also wants to thank the students, the academics, the staff, the Department heads, the Deans, and the Self Evaluation Steering Committee (SESC) for their time and attention. Finally, we extend our special thanks to the Director of the Quality Office, Professor Jim Gosling, and his colleagues, for their careful attention to all our logistical arrangements related to the visits.

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INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(February 2005)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Irish universities are required under the 1997 Universities Act to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". For this purpose, all seven Irish universities, represented by Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) have jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) to undertake a Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities.

The review was structured to accord with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the HEA concerning quality assurance under the Universities Act. The review was likewise designed to ensure that the university system and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts, and for the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities to be reviewed against best practice internationally.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of some 135 universities in 33 countries. The tenth anniversary of the EUA institutional review programme was celebrated during 2004.

The EUA adopts a dynamic methodological approach to evaluation. It focuses on the universities' capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring, and examines if the necessary conditions, both internal and external, are assembled to ensure that each institution is able to become more adaptable, responsive and successful in today's changing higher education environment.

The review of all seven Irish universities therefore took place in a coordinated manner during the calendar year 2004, following the IUQB/HEA terms of reference and using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These guidelines were especially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish quality review. The review teams were formed of experienced institutional leaders with wide-ranging expertise in quality assurance issues from across Europe, the USA and Canada.

Under the joint IUQB/HEA commission, the EUA has reported on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of each university's overall institutional decision making and strategic planning.

These key elements were placed within an institutional analysis that examined decision-making processes and allowed the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for effective internal quality management.

2. Process

Following a formal request from the President of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, the Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a team for the review of quality at NUI Maynooth.

This team was composed of:

- Hélène Lamicq, former President, University of Paris XII, France, as chair;
- Lee Fritschler, former President of Dickinson College, former Assistant Secretary for Post Secondary Education, Department of Education, USA;
- Bent Schmidt-Nielsen, former Rector, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Copenhagen, Denmark;
- Lewis Purser, programme manager, European University Association, as secretary.

The Team came to Maynooth for a preliminary visit from 11 to 13 May 2004 and for a main visit from 17 to 20 October 2004.

The EUA quality review methodology is guided by four central strategic questions. These questions, which have also been taken adopted by the IUQB in its Framework for Quality in Irish Universities, are:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

The EUA team used these questions as its framework when reviewing the quality assurance process at NUI Maynooth, within the wider institutional strategic setting.

In accordance with the EUA methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the preliminary visit, NUI Maynooth sent a 30 page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to the EUA team. This SER was accompanied by annexes with more detailed information about the University. The EUA Team appreciated the work done in the SER and considered it to be a good report, in terms of both information and analysis provided. The preparation of the SER involved an open process of wide consultation across the university – reports of which were given to the team. The team also received further relevant documents during its visits to Maynooth, including documentation from many Departments and other units.

Following its first visit, the EUA team requested further information regarding the position of the recently created research institutes in the university structures, and more detailed data regarding international student mobility. Generally speaking, the team was impressed with the overall quality of all the documentation received, being both extensive and analytical in nature.

During the EUA team's visits, discussions were lively and open, and the team appreciated the very transparent way in which the visits had been prepared. The different units across the university were well aware of the background to the team's presence and had no hesitation in engaging with the team. The entire review process at NUI Maynooth was undertaken in a very constructive and well organized manner.

The EUA review team would like to thank the NUI Maynooth President, Prof. John Hughes, and his predecessor, Dr. Séamus Smyth for their warm welcomes and frank engagement with the process. The team appreciated the close involvement of both Presidents with the exercise, which from the team's perspective contributed greatly to the high quality dialogue and the useful diagnostic and iterative processes. The team would also like to thank all the staff, students, members of Governing Authority and external stakeholders for the many helpful and open discussions during both preliminary and main review visits. The team especially wishes to thank Ms. Saranne Magennis, Quality Promotion Officer, and her staff for their excellent preparations and kind attentions in ensuring both the fine framework and the smooth logistics of the visits.

3. Institutional context

During its visits and discussions with NUI Maynooth leaders, staff, students and stakeholders, the EUA team gained a very positive general impression of a modest (in the best sense of the word) yet self-confident institution making rapid progress in a wide number of fields.

Although the university's origins stretch back to 1795, NUI Maynooth was formally created as a separate and autonomous university in 1997. An impressive number of achievements can be noted during the seven years since that date. Among these, the team identified the following as being of special significance:

- The good general climate across the university: it is obvious that people know each other, enjoy being on the Maynooth campus, are positive about their university and confident in its future;

- There has been a rapid expansion in facilities and buildings across the Campus; even during the short interval between the EUA visits, the John Hume Building - a major new multi-purpose development was completed - and new projects for additional student residences were started; the total floor space available has increased by more than 50% since 1998, and the new North campus is being beautifully landscaped to match the splendours of the historic South campus' trees and gardens. However, despite this well planned growth, there is still a pressing need for further physical investment and expansion;

- NUI Maynooth students are unanimously proud of their university, and student satisfaction levels with the academic programmes and other activities are high;

- New generations of students are increasingly attracted to the university; the number of Irish students selecting courses at NUI Maynooth as their first preference has increased by almost 80% since 1997 and the reputation of the university as an excellent place to study is now high among the younger generations. Students entering NUI Maynooth now need the same average levels of CAO entry points as students entering the other major Dublin universities;

- NUI Maynooth has a respected and growing reputation for academic excellence in an expanding number of programmes, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level;

- A small number of very good research centres have been developed, making full use of the opportunities offered under the various government sponsored initiatives to promote research activities;

- There appears to be a very effective and efficient management team at the university, built around a small executive group;

- A recent simplification of governance and management structures has taken place, with the appointment of an external chair of Governing Authority, a planned reduction in the number of sub-committees of Academic Council and a streamlining of the process for new academic appointments. This is remarkable in that it has taken place at the same time as a rapid period of growth;

- The university is now a robust institution, with functioning governance and management bodies at both executive and academic levels, a new and working Statute, and charters for research and for teaching and learning. It has recently appointed its first new President under the post-1997 Statute. The university has therefore come of age.

This first phase of growth appears to have been successfully achieved faster than might have been expected, indeed maybe to have taken some people within the university by surprise. Thus, one can now observe a variety of situations inside the university, with some parts having developed well, with healthy and mature structures, while others seemed to the EUA team still to be at the early stages of this development.

Given that this first phase of growth and development across the university has been rapid and successful, it is quite possible that the second phase will likewise begin earlier than expected. This second phase will naturally involve the consolidation of recent achievements, as well as a "normalisation" of structures and policies. Following this first period of rapid change and growth, there will inevitably be some difficult decisions to make, especially if the funding climate does not improve in the near future. In the opinion of the EUA team, some of the major elements which the university will have to face during this second phase of growth might be:

- Addressing the university's current academic structure, which is the result of organic and incremental growth since the start of higher education in Maynooth in 1795. Many Departments are too small, in terms of student and staff numbers as well as in breadth of discipline, to be successful in addressing the challenges which the university will now face during the next years. Greater critical mass across wider groupings of cognate fields would help in developing improved opportunities for interdisciplinarity and research, as well as for NUI Maynooth to have a greater multicultural and international outlook;

- Ensuring that ongoing development builds on what already exists, and is not a completely new strategy. It will be important to develop critical mass in those areas identified as main lines of the emerging profile of the university, and for NUI Maynooth to find its niche in the Irish university system by expressing its research policy and strategies more clearly. The forthcoming appointment of a Vice-President for Research will be important in this respect;

- Being more aware of strengths and weaknesses across the university, thereby enabling NUI Maynooth to address these and build on them as needed in developing both profile and strategy. This would benefit from an enhanced institutional research capacity;

- Focusing on the development of strong centres of excellence and integrating these centres in the university structure in order to avoid conflicts of interest between the centres and the departments. The EUA team felt that some of these centres did not currently feel totally integrated;

- Implementing specific tools for institutional analysis and planning, such as the next Strategic Plan, and a more strategic role for governing bodies, notably the Governing Authority, in guiding this second phase of growth;

- Adapting NUI Maynooth's resource allocation model to provide clear incentives and encouragement for developments according to university strategy and priorities;

- Supporting those parts of the university still in the early stages of development. If support mechanisms from the first phase are not carried over into the second phase to assist those parts which, for a variety of reasons, were previously less successful, some elements of the university will be left behind completely;

- Consolidating opportunities for a young and enthusiastic academic staff. NUI Maynooth has been successful in attracting promising young academics over the past number of years, and has a younger average staff age than the other Irish universities. The university must now offer greater perspectives to these young academics, to ensure that the best ones will stay in Maynooth, and for existing teams to consolidate based on criteria of quality and critical mass. Success in these will also be necessary in continuing to attract future talent to Maynooth;

- Consolidating recent reforms in the field of teaching and learning, such as the introduction of the modular system across all undergraduate programmes, in order to bring full benefits to staff and students. Among other things, this should also facilitate increased intersdisciplinarity;

- Developing a more explicit policy for the internationalization of teaching, learning and research across the university. Much is already taking place, especially in the main research fields, but much more can still be done, in order to place NUI Maynooth, its students and its graduates firmly in an international context and to benefit from the many exciting developments currently taking shape. The recent appointment of a Dean of International Education is one very positive step in this direction: this needs however to be put in a wider strategic context as part of the next phase of development;

- Increasing the focus on post-graduate students and programmes, including PhD and post-doctoral positions. This will also imply a new outlook in many parts of the university, and the explicit fostering of opportunities for these young researchers to meet, exchange ideas and develop as a community;

- Given the university's special geographical position outside any major Irish urban area, its success in attracting students and staff from across the country, and its emerging profile, it may be necessary to re-examine which services the university should be providing to which community, in terms of meeting its public responsibilities;

- Positioning the university to cope successfully with increased competition at national level with other Irish institutions for students, staff and resources;

- There will also be growing competition internally within NUI Maynooth. Since 1997 there has been plenty of scope for everybody to grow; the next phase may well be different, with the need to create the conditions necessary for an increased number of highly competitive teams.

4. Quality management

Background

NUI Maynooth was a leader in developing and introducing a formal quality assurance system in Irish universities during the 1990s. According to the SER, this concept "was embraced enthusiastically by the university as another valuable tool to assist it in its quest to achieve excellence". The degree of enthusiasm, at least among the university leadership, can be judged from the fact that the institution adopted a formal quality assurance and quality improvement system in late 1995, well ahead of the defining Universities Act of 1997. Since then, the university has moved rapidly to implement this formal system. The EUA team was impressed to see that this system already appears to have become a routine part of the work of the university, in the best sense of the term, particularly in the teaching and learning process.

Responsibility for quality management at NUI Maynooth lies with the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU), chaired by the Vice-President. The role of the QPU is to promote and encourage principles and practices which will lead to an enhancement in the quality of educational experience available to students and in the quality of the work experience for staff. The QPU has issued guidelines for quality improvement and quality assurance, covering the self-assessment phase for both academic and service units, as well as the external peer review phase. The QPU is supported in its work by the Quality Promotion Office, staffed by a Quality Promotion Officer, a Staff Development Officer (non teaching/research staff) (60%), a Teaching Development Officer, a Quality Support Officer and two full-time Executive Assistants.

Process

The 1997 Universities Act requires all Irish universities to create an internal quality assurance system. This law also gives the framework for this system:

- evaluations should be conducted at regular interval and not less than once in ten years
- all Departments and, where appropriate Faculties, and any service provided by the university should be evaluated
- teaching, research and the provision of other services should be the subjects of evaluation.

NUI Maynooth is now in the process of reviewing the full range of its academic departments and support services. A ten year schedule of reviews has been put in place – the longest such schedule possible under legislation. This schedule allows for two to four academic departments to be reviewed per year, as well as one or two service units. By 2004, 22 out of 26 academic units had been reviewed, and eight out of twelve service units. No plans appear to have been made to review Faculties or other types of units at the university. The quality review process at NUI Maynooth follows the basic framework as laid down by the IUQB, involving self-assessment, peer review and, starting with the 2003-04 academic year, a formal response from the reviewed unit outlining proposed actions. This quality improvement phase in each unit will be monitored after two years. The recent formal addition of the quality improvement action proposals is in response to the need for ownership and responsibility for follow-up to be taken by the relevant unit, and not left to the university executive.

The EUA team was informed that the aim of the QR process at NUI Maynooth is to promote quality improvement and change, as part of the university's commitment to the pursuit of excellence. The QR process is seen as one element of quality monitoring and management, and not as a process isolated from the other quality management tools and mechanisms which also exist. These are listed by the university as:

- Training and development opportunities
- President's prizes
- Teaching awards
- Research prizes
- Research awards schemes
- Promotion procedures
- Staff recruitment procedures
- New course approval procedures
- Professional accreditation of certain courses
- Programme boards
- External examiners system
- Formal student feedback
- Student mentoring systems (especially for first year students)
- Feedback from employers after student work experience programmes
- Scholarships
- Student recruitment procedures

The team was pleased to note in the SER that the QR process was explicitly linked to the many other quality assurance measures which exist at the university, and that these were all considered integral elements in working towards a quality culture at NUI Maynooth. The above list is however certainly incomplete and does not include many of the quality assurance mechanisms linked to research evaluation, some of which are separated from the formal QR process. Many of the above, such as prizes and promotions, are furthermore optional and will therefore only engage the more enthusiastic and usually better performing staff. Increased synergy between the formal QR process and these other quality assurance and improvement mechanisms will help provide the high quality information necessary at both unit and university level to lead the strategic development of the institution.

However, widespread and sustainable quality improvement in an organisation is unlikely without the opportunity regularly to review and discuss the quality of performance of all individuals. The EUA team was therefore pleased to learn that new legislation in Ireland now provides for a performance management development system, and that this system will be in place for all staff at NUI Maynooth during 2005. The team encourages the university leadership to articulate this closely with the QR process, since both are essential elements for quality management.

The Student Union leaders informed the EUA team that the system of student class representatives was working satisfactorily at the university, and that regular meetings between students and their Departments allowed for good feedback, often better than through formal student evaluation forms. This information was generally corroborated by staff and students elsewhere, although there is clearly still room for improvement. The Student Union is also preparing, for the first time, a university-wide student survey on student services and related matters. Such initiatives should be encouraged and supported, since developing and promoting quality is very much a two-way process which requires active student involvement. The systematic notification of the Student Union of forthcoming departmental quality reviews is an excellent step which has already been taken – this gives the student leaders the responsibility to ensure that the student class representatives are involved and that students are active participants.

Observations regarding the Quality Review process

During its visits, the EUA team heard many positive comments from both academic and administrative staff concerning both what the formal QR process has brought to the teaching and learning process across the university as well as the way in which this process has been conducted. These benefits include greater transparency and clarity in programme structures, curricula and contents; better information available for students, e.g. the provision of course handbooks; the development of an evidence-based approach, and the increased use of data for monitoring and planning teaching and learning activity within individual Departments and Faculties and across the university. The process has also facilitated the recent university-wide moves to semesterization and modularization.

The team learned that the QR process has also been considered generally useful in bringing staff together and encouraging greater collective understanding of what they are doing, in both pedagogical and administrative fields. The process has helped them to identify the issues and to improve methods and practices, thus supporting ongoing developments at the university and also ensuring new staff are aware of the environment in which they start to work. It has also facilitated better staff – student relations, improving staff responsiveness to student needs, and has led to the establishment of various consultative committees allowing for a wider spectrum of inputs to deliberations.

These developments, due at least in part to the QR process, have also helped central management units in providing more relevant support to teaching and research across the university. One particular area of use has been the recent systematic provision of clearer information for both staff and students.

An important positive point worth stressing is that the QR process has provoked extensive discussions at NUI Maynooth about quality and related concepts and issues. The EUA team noted that these are taking place at many different places and levels across the campus. No long term change is possible in open public organisations without the benefit of such discussions, and the positive and enabling atmosphere created by the university and the Quality Promotion Unit and Office appear to have had a significant impact in encouraging the long term development of a university-wide quality culture and in managing this change process.

Most of the evidence gathered by the EUA team therefore points to the conclusion that the QRP appears to be working well. Quality awareness certainly seems to be quite high across campus.

However, the team also gathered evidence which suggested that the quality review process could be improved further.

There is a need for more systematic feedback from the university to units which have been reviewed. While a formal meeting between the President and the head of Department does take place, this is often felt, at least by the head of Department, either to take place too late or not to cover all the issues. The recent

introduction of a formal phase of planning actions for quality improvement within the statutory quality review process will certainly address this need.

Although primary responsibility for implementation of the recommendations lies with the unit under review, it is important for the university to signal that it is aware of the issues raised and supportive of the process, including changes proposed. Even in cases where not all the necessary resources are available, such feedback would convey a highly positive message that the QR process is indeed important, and that the university has taken seriously the large amount of work and effort put into this by the unit and the peer review group. Rapid feedback and consultation will also help the university in feeding the outcomes of each review into the wider decision making processes at the university.

The lack of feedback creates uncertainty at Departments. Apart from missing a potential opportunity to strengthen the quality culture across the university, there is also a danger that this could also lead to demotivation and disengagement by certain elements of the academic staff. It is important to maintain the high levels of staff engagement with the QR process so far. This should not however be taken for granted.

In some cases, the external assessors report would appear not to have given due consideration to research activity at the unit under review, apart from requesting lists of publications. This does not help the unit situate itself in the wider context across the university, or indeed internationally, or to see whether it has the necessary research activity to keep its teaching and other work up to date.

Given the new context in which Maynooth is now operating, the EUA team considers that the guidelines provided to external assessors should be re-examined to emphasize a wider view of quality, including internationalization, interdisciplinarity and research, and making a clearer distinction between those recommendations which can be implemented without additional resources and those which do indeed require investment.

The team also considers that, in order for the review to be seen as independent, the choices regarding composition of these teams should be completely independent of the Departments or units under review. The EUA team would encourage a more strategic approach to the choice of members of these teams. Greater involvement of Faculty leaders in the drawing up or approval of shortlists might be helpful. The QR process might also benefit from a greater number of international participants in the review teams. The list of external reviewers at NUI Mayooth during the period 1996 – 2002 was overwhelmingly comprised of peers from other Irish or UK universities. If the university intends to become a better known player in some areas on the European or international stage, it would make sense to start using the QR process to benchmark and position the university, as well as to expose it to some potentially new practices and experience.

The methodology which has been used so far has led the EUA team to wonder to what extent the current organization of the QR process serves to reinforce existing departmental structures and boundaries. Other factors seem to suggest that changes in these structures may be needed to strengthen higher levels of responsibility and to support interdisciplinary and research processes. The team also considers that, independent of the QR methodology, the quality per se of academic activities at NUI Maynooth will depend on the creation of units with a certain critical mass in terms of teaching, research and management capacity.

A consequence has been that issues such as interdisciplinarity, and possible future-oriented strategic curricular choices, have in certain cases been ignored by the QR process so far. In addition to this, NUI Maynooth has now introduced a modular structure across all undergraduate courses, and in the future, increasing numbers of modules should be shared across a variety of fields. Given these rapid changes not only in Maynooth but across higher education generally, the QR process must find ways of assessing the quality of such academic work which does not necessarily belong exclusively to any one academic Department or even Faculty.

When the EUA team looked at the overall extent of the QR process and the wealth of information which it generates, both from internal and external sources, it was obvious that this process should provide one source of input into the strategic planning process. This has indeed already been the case. But the team considers the current moment to be of particular significance given that NUI Maynooth will soon start to develop a new five-year strategic plan. The Governing Authority has so far been informed of the outcomes of the individual unit reviews, but does not appear to have been given any overview or analysis of the overall findings and consequences of the QR process across the university. For the process to reach its full potential, the university must also learn from the process and use its outcomes in a very consistent way to inform change and development.

One of the challenges regarding the necessary feedback loops from the QR process for management and strategic planning is the long timeframe in which the QR process is working. It is difficult to use a half-completed QR review cycle in the strategic planning process, in so far as feedback from many parts of the university is missing. The same applies to the allocation of additional resources on the basis of QR outcomes, when only some of the Departments have been evaluated. This is made more difficult in times of budgetary uncertainty: some Departments may be lucky enough to be evaluated and receive positive feedback in a good financial year at the university, while others may be evaluated in a year of cutbacks. Priority setting is a result of comparison but a fair comparison can only be done when all units have been evaluated.

This and other remarks point to the need for the possibility to conduct fewer evaluations but for these to focus on larger groups of Departments, such as Faculties. A balance should be found between this university-level requirement and the continued desirability of evaluating basic units of teaching, research and administration, where a focus is possible on grass roots activity and which involve as many staff and students as possible in the process.

5. Some areas for special attention in the further development of quality

Based on its findings during the visits and discussions, the EUA team considers that the following areas merit special attention as NUI Maynooth continues to develop the quality of its various activities across the institution:

- The university has grown on a traditional disciplinary basis. The EUA team observed however a strong and recent growth in interdisciplinary activity, both in terms of new curricula put in place, as well as in the creation of interesting research centres. The team saw these as very positive developments for the university. The university needs to ensure that these centres are supported and further developed during the next phase of development, by putting in place the necessary structures and support elements to ensure their sustainability, including if necessary the focusing of new recruitment in these interdisciplinary structures. It would also be desirable to encourage stronger organic links between these research centres and the academic Departments, although the current funding mechanisms do not facilitate this.

- The need to connect the resource allocation processes, the systematic development of the university and the ongoing diversification of its activities. For example: current allocations to individual Departments based on full time equivalent students cannot cope with the sharing of modules across several Departments; if post-graduate numbers and programmes are to be increased, it may be necessary to re-weight post-graduate student FTEs to support this policy; it is not clear how the recent positive growth of interdisciplinary teaching and research activity can be sustained with the current core allocation processes; the need for increased internationalisation at various levels will pose a similar question.

- The modularization of all undergraduate teaching programmes is now formally in place, but the full implementation of this is still in progress. The team considers that developing the full potential of this will need special attention, in order to allow, for example, more core modules to be shared across several Departments, and a significant increase in the number of students who choose individual elective modules from outside their immediate study fields. An important number of courses offered at NUI Maynooth currently include no elective modules whatever. Given the overall size of the university and its recent growth, there is a danger that, without significantly improved possibilities to share modules across Departments, an unnecessary doubling of academic supply could result, whereas in fact economies of scale are possible through the opening up of academic structures.

- The modularization process should also guarantee that students are able to obtain full recognition of credits legitimately obtained in other institutions of higher education, and the transfer and / or accumulation of these. This is not currently the case. It should be recalled that one of the main purposes of modules and ECTS is to facilitate flexibility, not hinder student mobility.

- Modularisation should logically also encourage exchanges with other Irish institutions and foreign universities; furthermore, exchanges can be developed with the world of work, since professional experience can be taken into account, as is already the case in some Faculties and Departments. These multicultural experiences are essential for the success of students and graduates of NUI Maynooth in the global job market which awaits them.

- NUI Maynooth has linked its recent development to international benchmarks and trends, and has now become an attractive place for academic staff and students from abroad to work. The EUA team was therefore surprised to note that, in certain parts of the university, only a few students saw their studies or future professional prospects in a European or international arena. Student awareness of higher education trends and developments outside of Ireland was minimal. The team would suggest that to modify this perspective implies :

  - an explicit international focus across the university, including specific efforts to encourage students and staff to improve their foreign language skills;

  - increased awareness and involvement of staff in international academic networks, including for staff development and training, thus exposing students indirectly to greater international and intercultural influences;

  - greater encouragement for students to undertake some period of study abroad;

  - improved recognition of study and work periods abroad;

  - increased support for a multicultural approach to higher education and social issues in all parts of the university, using its multidisciplinary basis as an asset for promoting this.

- Given the specific characteristics of the Maynooth student body, with greater participation rates of mature students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds than in other Irish universities, encouraging such a renewed international focus for students implies a long term commitment from the university, including a greatly enhanced package of incentives to overcome specific obstacles. Otherwise many Irish students from Maynooth will be further disadvantaged in the European and international labour markets.

- One of the university's current strengths lies in the youth of its academic staff. However, many of these staff are apparently on short-term contracts; this has obvious implications for their long-term

commitment to this university. The EUA team would encourage the university, as soon as possible, to offer longer term perspectives to these young academics, thus encouraging them to contribute fully to the ongoing development and dynamism in Maynooth. The uncertainty which a large number of young staff currently face could result in the possible serious loss of capacity in a number of academic units across the university. This is a short term risk which must be countered rapidly by a long term strategy to consolidate academic teams and to encourage additional new talent to Maynooth.

- One aspect of human resource management at the university has to be seen from the point of view of gender balance, which needs to be addressed through both recruitment and promotion mechanisms, particularly to positions of responsibility. The EUA team was pleased to note that the President has already made plans to remedy this.

- In the current stage of its development, the university needs to develop an explicit research strategy. In the opinion of the EUA team, this seemed vital in order to ensure that a variety of dispersed research and funding initiatives find their place in a coherent structure. We would encourage the university to identify areas of strength and possible growth around which it can focus its future research development and its international impact. This might lead to the creation of several further centres with high visibility, and to support for other teams of critical mass working in networks with Irish or other institutions.

- Future research strengths will depend to a large degree on success in developing PhD and post-doc activity – itself a clear sign of success in developing research at the university. Attention needs to be paid to the conditions in which many of these young researchers currently work. The university may also need to develop a more explicit strategy to bring suitable students to post-graduate and PhD levels in selected fields. This could include the provision of joint degrees in some areas with other universities in Ireland or elsewhere, thus helping to attain critical mass and widen the scope of such activity at NUI Maynooth.

- The university will need to develop an intermediate level of professional administrative staff which can support and implement many of the issues covered in this report. The current fragmented dispersal of these key players across many small departments and units of the university does not permit this. This issue also needs to be discussed fully when addressing the university's current academic structures, since it may serve the university's needs better to bring these key players together at Faculty level, or around cognate groups of Departments, or in some cases at central university level.

- In the opinion of the EUA team, during the next phase of its development the university can increasingly benefit from strategic advice coming from a range of the university's essential partners. Its already effective local and regional partnerships can be a real asset in developing this. In order for this to take place, a pro-active role on the part of the Governing Authority will be crucial. The Governing Authority will however need to be provided by the university executive with the necessary elements, both information and tools, for it to play this role in the strategic development of the University, including in the preparation of the new Strategic Plan.

- The need for increased institutional research capacity, including an improved and integrated data management system was mentioned several times to the EUA team. This would appear necessary both to support central university management with strategic data and analysis, as well as to provide a greater range of easily accessible information to units across the university and to external partners. This information will be vital for planning and monitoring, and will also be of significant support to units preparing for the QR process.

6. Envoi

During its two visits to NUI Maynooth, the EUA team met large numbers of open-minded and dynamic people with whom it was a real pleasure to examine the current state of the university and the role of quality assurance in developing this. The university is at a stage in its own development, which, linked to the current Irish context, offers a variety of exciting opportunities. The team considered that the university is well positioned to continue establishing its own place in the Irish higher education system, based on the quality of its work and its collective capacity for change. The team was confident that the university will meet these opportunities with determination and vision, in order to ensure its long term visibility and attractiveness and to strengthen its international and national positions.

The team would like to thank NUI Maynooth once again for its hospitality and the excellent conditions provided, and to wish the university every success in its continued development.

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(November 2004)

Table of Contents

Part I Introduction

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) to review the Quality Assurance system in Irish universities. The review was structured in accordance with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the HEA concerning quality assurance under the Irish Universities Act 1997. Under this Act, the Irish universities are required to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". The EUA review process is designed to ensure that the university system and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews, and that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities can be reviewed according to best practice internationally.

For this purpose, the HEA and all seven universities represented by the IUQB have engaged EUA to undertake this review with the assistance of experts from Europe, America and Canada. The reviews are coordinated during the calendar year 2004, following the terms of reference and using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish review.

The EUA Institutional Review Programme

The European University Association (EUA) has a strong international reputation in Quality Assurance. More than 130 universities in some 35 countries have been reviewed since the Institutional Review Program started in 1994, mostly in Europe but also in Latin America and South Africa. In the review, EUA adopts a dynamic methodology approach to evaluation. It focuses on the universities' capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring, and examines if all the preconditions are assembled to make each and every institution more adaptable and responsive to the changing higher education environment at national, European and international level.

The aims and the main purpose of the EUA Institutional Review are to assist the university in improving in quality management and to promote the university's capacity for change in order to adapt to their evolving environment. From a long-term perspective, the EUA hopes to contribute to the promotion of a quality culture among its member universities, and to disseminate examples of effective strategic management among the European universities. The EUA does not presume to provide the university with a blueprint for its development; rather, the review process is a consultative and supportive one.

The Review Team

This EUA Review Team was commissioned to conduct the Institutional Review at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, henceforth referred to in the following text as Trinity College.

The Review Team of Trinity College consisted of Professor Luc E. Weber, former rector of Geneva University (Switzerland), chair, Professor Tove Bull, former rector of Tromsö University (Norway), Professor Robert Glidden, president emeritus of Ohio University (USA), members, and Senior Lecturer Airi Rovio-Johansson, Göteborg University (Sweden) as secretary of the Review Team. The preliminary visit took place June 30-July 1, 2004, and the main visit was on October 14-16, 2004.

A short summary of the working method

The Review Team met during those visits with Provost John Hegarty, Senior Lecturers Sheila Greene and John Murray, Academic Secretary Vivien Jenkins, College Secretary Michael Gleeson and Liaison persons Mary O'Hora, Sally Lee and Elizabeth Donnellan. The Review Team also met the Self Evaluation Steering Group, the Executive Officers' Group, the Deans and Department Heads of the Faculties visited, representatives of College Board, University Council, University Committees, Research Centres, external stakeholders, academics, staff, and groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

During the preliminary visit the Review Team met representatives of the Faculty of Business, Economic and Social Studies, and Faculty of Engineering and Systems Sciences. During the Main visit the Review Team met representatives of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts (Humanities), and Faculty of Arts (Letters), Trinity Foundation, and the Quality Unit, which is an integrated part of the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL).

The Review Team observed that both visits were very well organised and wishes to underline the good working relationship between the Provost and the organizing team. The Review Team wants to thank the Provost and his teams for their hospitality at Trinity College.

The Self-Review document (Trinity College, 2004a) gave an excellent general overview on Trinity College. At the end of the Preliminary Visit the Review Team asked for supplementary information for the Main Visit, regarding the restructuring process of Trinity College's organisation, the Results of the Student Life Survey, the Equality Policies and their implementation, the statistics about postgraduate students and supervisors, and related Rules and Regulations for research students. The Supplementary Documentation (Trinity College, 2004b) was also excellent and gave the Review Team a deeper understanding of the internal rules and constraints in Trinity College.

The Review Team was impressed with the aims for restructuring the organization of Trinity College and the development of the new Academic-based Resource Allocation (ARAM) model set by the Provost, and of the work and the efforts of many others, led by the university Management, the Faculties, Departments, Institutes, Centres, Library and the Central Administrative Functions. The Review Team identified some areas where constraints of varying complexity are apparent and need attention from the Management of Trinity College. Many initiatives have already been taken to address these constraints and to advance the restructuring process.

After this introduction, the second part of the report consists of an analysis of the context, and the conditions under which Trinity College has to operate. Then, the mission statement, constraints, opportunities and the challenges in the institutional context are identified. The third part of this report deals with the recommendations from the Review Team with specific focus on the Restructuring Process, the Quality Assurance system, and the Quality Reviews of departments at Trinity College.

Part II University Of Dublin, Trinity College

A. Institutional context

The remarkable economic growth during the late 1990's is one result of Ireland's commitment to tertiary education as a means of enhancing the social and the economic development of the country. However, Ireland now has to tackle the disparities of economic activities, educational attainment and personal wealth among Irish regions as well as the critical factors in achieving a knowledge-based society with a high capacity for innovation. Institutions of tertiary education play an important role in attaining a knowledge society by investing in key disciplinary areas as well as in major interdisciplinary research projects. From this perspective tertiary education institutions have been successful in recruiting students. The entry rate 2002 to Irish Tertiary courses reached 57% of the age cohort as compared to 67%, OECD-mean (OECD EAG, Indicator C2.1, Table 3). Although the expansion rate is better than the European average of graduates in science and technology, the expansion has taken place almost entirely at the 18- to- 21-year-old level. The aspiration of further expansion of the participation in the tertiary education system has to be a long-term investment in a recruitment policy that encompasses students from all socio-economic groups, and in particular those from lower socio-economic groups, due to the societal aims of equity and social welfare. The demand to re-energize the aims of life-long learning and to enlarge the proportion of part-time students, expressed in the Universities Act 1997, is recognized by the tertiary education system as a problem to be solved in the near future.

International trends in the higher education sector are also recognized in the Irish tertiary education system, such as changing priorities for public expenditures, higher demand for access to tertiary education, higher demand for more economically independent and socially responsive education and research, pressure to improve quality in education and research, improved efficiency and output of graduates and a demand for more individual and independent technology-supported learning opportunities and less traditional teaching methods. In a rapidly changing economic environment there is certainly a need for more autonomous and independent institutions as in most European countries, in order to develop strategic plans, take action and meet future requirements and challenges (Universities Act, 1997, Part III, Chapter 1).

In terms of resources

The Government's recurrent grant allocation of resources to universities lacks transparency, and real cutbacks in this grant have ranged from 3% to 8% in the last three years. Even if the "Research income has grown dramatically" (Self-Review document, Appendix 11), Trinity College still has an inadequate budget to meet the internal needs of the university and of the surrounding society. Unfortunately, in most European countries the Government imposes restrictions on the operations of the universities, as in Ireland, which affects negatively teaching, research, and services in the universities. If Irish tertiary education and research are to continue as key drivers for the Irish economy, the Government must invest more in tertiary education. So far, the level of investment is currently below the Lisbon target of 3%, partly due to the low level of industrial investment in research and development.

The ongoing restructuring process of Trinity College is aiming at a higher accountability and a higher efficiency of research, teaching and services of the university. However, the scarce finances of Trinity College have forced the institution to set priorities in the most promising research areas and to concentrate on selected fields of activities. The continuously increasing number of students has affected the resources for research and teaching. Constraints in resources mean constraints to recruit the best researchers and the best teachers. However, the restriction on the College in terms of the application of public sector norms in determining salary levels is a constraint which has to be resolved if the university wants to achieve an international reputation as a research university and become one among the best in the world.

The Review Team acknowledges and commends the steps already taken by the Trinity College Management in establishing a fundraising organization.

In terms of teaching

The students are proud of being students in Trinity College and they are well aware of the added value of having a certificate, diploma or degree (undergraduate or graduate) from the College. In spite of that, they are in need of tutorials due to the large lectures, in which the number of students makes it impossible to put questions to the lecturer. Students reported that such lectures turn out to be "spoon-feeding" exercises rather than creative intellectual challenges for them. It is therefore important that small group teaching be provided, particularly where there are large lecture groups. According to the students, the first and the second year of study programmes are characterised by large lectures for as many as 200 students per lecture. The College reports that it offers 49 undergraduate degree programmes of which only three have quotas in excess of 200, but in some areas courses may be grouped together for lectures.

The Review Team noticed, in discussions with undergraduate and post-graduate students, that course evaluations were not compulsory (mandatory), which means that the students' experiences are not systematically collected or taken into consideration in Quality Audits or the strategic plans of departments. Neither have there been systematic curriculum reviews in all departments, according to academic staff whom the Review Team interviewed. However, College administrators explained that as of April 2004, revised guidelines call for curriculum reviews to be undertaken regularly as part of normal academic activity. They are now required in the year preceding the departmental review and are to include review of content, learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methods.

The Review Team was also told by academics that there was a lack of support for enhancing the quality of teaching, but the College points out that the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning was established in October 2003 to assist in developing a strong and integrated framework for supporting best academic practice and the highest quality of study learning. Further, it is noted that prior to the establishment of this Centre a number of initiatives were in place, including a) teaching development grants; b) awards for teaching excellence; c) staff development courses on enhancing teaching; and d) a central facility to provide student feedback on courses. Also, the Centre for Learning Technology, which aims to support best practice in the use of ICT in teaching and learning, was established in 2000. According to the academics, too few lecturers are promoted per year. However, initiatives have been taken to recognise teaching excellence.

Students have complaints about the number of course books available for them in the Library. They need access to more Library hours as well, and they believe there should be more library staff to support them. Some students pointed out that there is a lack of supervisors who are permanent academics at Trinity College, since some disciplines instead use contract lecturers, but the College reports that only about 3% of research students are supervised by non-permanent academic staff. Students also had some complaints about the equipment in laboratories.

According to the post-graduate students, there is a lack of academic personnel to organize PhD programmes in and between different faculties, and of statutes and internal rules about how to load their research work with (1) teaching and (2) supervision of undergraduate students.

The groups of students expressed worries about the discussion of suggested student fees, which has been a recommendation in the published OECD Report, "Review of National Policies for Education: Review of Higher Education in Ireland" (2004).

Another restraint is the age structure of the teaching staff in several faculties (Trinity College, 2004a). To ensure sustainable change for the future, it is necessary that a number of young academics be brought to responsible positions to secure a continuity of research and teaching.

The Review Team acknowledges that Trinity College has collected important information regarding teaching and student performances related to programmes, faculties and student outcomes (Trinity College, 2004a and 2004b). The Review Team also acknowledges that Trinity College has an extensive quality assurance system of academic activities, which gives regular feedback to the departments, academics and the faculty dean.

In terms of research

The Self-Review document of Trinity College expresses an aspiration to reach international recognition as one of the 100 best universities in the world, both in research and in teaching, in order to attract the brightest students (Trinity College, 2004a). The pre-condition of successful international cooperation will be to enhance existing memberships of international networks and to find new partners in those research fields or programmes that are already on a high level.

The Review Team supports the initiative of Trinity College to give priority to research in areas such as Nanoscience, Genetics/Genomics (molecular biology), and interdisciplinary areas such as Biotechnology, and Irish-Scottish Studies. These research areas have already established international contacts and are included in international research networks, prerequisites for advanced international research.

The lack of time due to a heavy load of teaching negatively influences Trinity College academics' opportunities to conduct research. The possibilities for lecturers' research activities seem to be better in Research Centres, on condition that research grants have been received from the research foundations or the Government.

The lack of multi-annual funding from State sources is a central problem to be solved in order to be able to make a strategic plan for the future research.

In terms of organization

Trinity College has a University Board and a University Council, both chaired by the Provost (Trinity College, 2004a, Appendix 9). The Management Team (Executive Officers) acts as an executive group and consists of the Provost, the Vice-Provost, the Senior Lecturer, the Dean of Research, the Registrar, the Bursar, the Treasurer and the College Secretary. Members of the Management Team are appointed by the Provost. Currently, there are two "steering systems" which have different aims and working methods: a) a collegial system, working out policies of the university ruled by the Faculties and the Departments, and b) an executive administrative system related to the Board and the Management Team. Although these arrangements are intended to integrate the two systems, from the perspective of academics the two systems seem to be parallel rather than integrated, and the administrative system is the least transparent.

The process of restructuring the six faculties and the 64 departments seems to have engaged the entire organization and the Management Team over the last year, even though it was formally constituted in April 2004. The restructuring process has engaged almost all academics, non-academics and elected student representatives, before and during the summer months, and an additional challenge has been presented by the simultaneous introduction of a new Academic-based Resource Allocation (ARAM) model. The restructuring process opens many possibilities for researchers and teachers to better co-operate within and between disciplines and faculties, which will be further elaborated in this report.

In terms of Quality Assurance System

The Self-Review document was considered to provide a very good overview of how the College works and it was the first time that such a report had been produced. It was pointed out to the Review Team by some of the deans that the Self-Evaluation process was not a threatening process but it was challenging. Among academics, most of them appreciated the Self-Evaluation process. The possibility to talk to colleagues, identify department problems and reorganize academic activities was highly appreciated as well as the result, a comprehensive view of all the department's activities.

The number of quality reviews and quality audits did not always give achievable recommendations due to lack of resources. Recommendations given are not always related to existing resources and budgets, for example, recommendations regarding appointment of positions and purchase of equipment. According to the department heads, external reviewers were carefully selected for their expertise in the discipline, so perhaps it is only to be expected that some of the auditors behaved as strong advocates for the discipline, resulting in demands for resources that were often not achievable. Reports from audits resulted many times in different interpretations, according to the viewpoint or position of the interpreter. Some academics suggested that evaluation of leadership must be integrated in quality reviews. Others claimed that the guidelines for auditors should be clarified to avoid unrealistic recommendations.

B. Mission, opportunities and challenges

Mission

The mission of Trinity College is a commendable achievement in accordance with the 1997 Universities Act and traditional core values of European universities (Trinity College, 2004a, Appendix 3).

Trinity College builds on its four hundred year old tradition of scholarship to confirm its position as one of the great universities of the world, providing a liberal educational environment where independence of thought is highly valued and where staff and students are nurtured as individuals and are encouraged to achieve their full potential. The College is committed to excellence in both research and teaching, to the enhancement of the learning experience of each of its students and to an inclusive College community with equality of access for all. The College will continue to disseminate its knowledge and expertise to the benefit of the City of Dublin, the country and the international community (Trinity College, 2004a, Appendix 3).

Trinity College has a Strategic Plan, 2003-2008 (Trinity College, 2004a, Appendix 3). The aims and aspirations of the Strategic Plan are long-term. If and when these aims are achieved, then the College's position as a research-led university with an international reputation will have been confirmed. The overall aim is to reach such a position both in education and in research and in the global competitive environment of higher education.

Trinity College has internal statutes which regulate many of its activities. It is a well regulated organisation through four hundred years of history.

The Self-Review document and Strategic Plan 2003-2008 of Trinity College recognize the Bologna charter 1999, signed by 29 Ministers of Education. The idea of the document is to promote core objectives such as quality, mobility, employability, and competitiveness. The changing external society of the Irish higher education system and the globalization of higher education create a competitive environment. The Research and Scholarship Programme will play a crucial role in the accomplishment of the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 of Trinity College to reach the position as one of the top research universities internationally. "Trinity will have the breadth of endeavour across the disciplines, based on research programmes of individual researchers,

which will allow for future unexpected advances, foster academic freedom and enhance our teaching" (Trinity College, 2004a, Appendix 3). Trinity College also commits itself to offer an Educational Programme that has as one of its aims to respond to the needs of Irish society and to build up an infrastructure that will support the research and the educational programmes. Trinity College also commits itself to offer Lifelong Learning to respond to the needs of the Irish society. A Working Group is preparing a report to the University Council on this subject.

In the Strategic Plan (or corresponding Academic Plan) of most of the European universities, a mission statement and a vision of the university is included. A minority of them implement measures to make their activities in compliance with their abstract goals. In the Strategic Plan 2003-2008, Trinity College has transformed the mission statement into comprehensive and concrete activities. The on-going restructuring process of the organization is a time-consuming process of transformation and change, which involves not only the Management of the College, the academic bodies of the College but also most of the academics, the staff and the students' representatives.

Inadequate funding is an obstacle to Trinity College's endeavour to meet international competition among research universities, in spite of the fact that Ireland has adopted the Lisbon objectives of 3% of GNP to research. The increasing cost of research and of attracting top researchers in different fields, coupled with the high cost of living in Dublin and the restrictions on the College in terms of determining salary levels, are major challenges for Trinity College to overcome in near future. The EU has the ambition to create more transparent higher education and research areas, in which international alliances and networks of excellence will play an important role in the struggle of increasing concentration of excellence and increasing importance of interdisciplinary research and education. On the national level, Trinity College has to be a strong advocate for a new and visionary policy for funding of medical education and a policy for the timing of budget allocations from the Government.

Opportunities

The prestige of Trinity College, in a competitive environment, opens possibilities for it to partner with other major international universities on research projects in areas such as Nanoscience, Nuclear medicine, Genetics/ Genomics and Biotechnology. There are also other opportunities, such as the probable creation of the European Research Council (ERC), and a changing European paradigm of financing regional development, which opens new possibilities for financing research. The precondition of successful international cooperation will be to identify international research partners in those fields and programmes at Trinity that are already prepared for international cooperation on a high level. Trinity's fund-raising activities have developed positively and have opened possibilities for new research initiatives during recent years.

Trinity College has an established brand name based on an international reputation for excellence, bold leadership with a vision for the future, institutional pride, and attractor of the brightest students, offering them a high degree of academic innovation and interdisciplinary courses. Trinity Colleges undertakes a high degree of specialization and a strong teaching potential in many disciplines. A reorganization process of the entire organization and management structures is going on to ensure effective and efficient future governance, efficient use of resources, and world-class research and education at Trinity College.

The researchers and the teachers of Trinity College have demonstrated high accomplishment based on good will and a sense of ownership, when it comes to the fulfilment of the mission statement of the College. They also have a high acceptance of quality reviews in spite of the frequency of the reviews and the preparations in advance.
The restructuring process at Trinity College will probably result in new academic synergies due to new relationships of disciplines, academics and units. This opens possibilities for a revitalization of teaching and

research at the College. The restructuring of the efficiency of academic services might be expected to give new possibilities and more time to teaching and research. And the new Academic-based Resource Allocation (ARAM) model, focused on research and academic activities, will enhance the possibility to facilitate institutional research priorities.

Challenges

The competitiveness in the higher education arena has become much stronger from both a national and an international perspective. In a situation in which institutions get inadequate economic support from the Government, the need to develop advocacy strategies for supporting the higher education system in Ireland is a challenge for all higher education institutions, as well as to become appropriately entrepreneurial in order to raise revenue to support new academic initiatives.

Among the challenges Trinity College has to face currently is the need to enhance the conditions for the research and researchers to be able to reach higher international acknowledgement, recruit internationally renowned staff in spite of the high living costs in Dublin, and increase the recruitment of overseas students to post-graduate studies. There is a balance to be struck between the struggles for the achievement of long-term goals at Trinity College and to respond to current immediate needs of the society, in order to get funding for the university, for instance, to choose between courses that last two weeks or four-year undergraduate programmes. These are serious questions to face while at the same time keeping to the mission and settled goals of the university.

The restructuring process builds on the trust, high morale and responsiveness of the academics, the students and the staff. The prerequisites are the maintenance of academic quality, communication and consultation regarding their opinions of the structural change and the implementation of the new resource allocation model. The real challenge is to implement structural change and a new resource allocation model simultaneously. To manage the competition from other Irish universities and attract excellent academics and PhD students internationally will be challenging future work.

Part III Recommendations

The EUA Review Team recognizes that Trinity College's plan for reorganization has incentives for economic improvement as well as new possibilities for the academics. All academics need the maximum information about these possibilities and about structural issues related to the reorganization process. The change process has to assist academics and staff in asking how balance among major disciplinary areas, e.g., science and humanities, is going to be maintained, and how priorities can be established taking into account the varying research funding potential of different areas. Discussion of how these matters are to be resolved should be encouraged and the identity of disciplines and interdisciplinarity supported. Information provision and discussion at all levels should be encouraged concerning the new Academically-based Resource Allocation (ARAM) and new structures.

The new allocation model can only function if a data management system functions as a support system to the model. There is a great challenge to manage the restructuring process and the simultaneous introduction of the ARAM model. In the developing process of the ARAM model, careful attention has to be given to the selection and weighting of criteria. Although the ARAM model for future distribution of resources probably will give great attention to current differences among disciplines, departments and faculties regarding research and teaching, there are also varying costs of teaching by subjects, which has to be taken into account. Overall, these innovations should be in concordance with the mission statement for 2003-2008 and help to shape the strategic direction of Trinity College during the period.

As mentioned earlier, this review was structured to accord with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) concerning quality assurance under the Irish Universities Act 1997. In terms of teaching, the Review Team observed that the evaluation of courses was not mandatory in Trinity College. Therefore, the Review Team strongly recommends that systematic evaluations of all courses be introduced immediately. However, these evaluations should be kept confidential and not made public. Students should be informed of actions taken as a result of the evaluations, even if this form of feed-back has to overcome some practical problems, e.g., to find the group of students who made the evaluation. If this is impossible, one alternative is to inform the new course group of students and tell them about actions taken due to the evaluation. The deans and department heads have the responsibility for follow-up of course evaluations. In the evaluation of courses many different models can be used and national or international institutions that have experience with this form of evaluation can be consulted. The role of the Quality Unit is supportive in relation to course evaluations.

Most of the departments the Review Team met have gone through the first round of the Quality Audits. For the most part these experiences seem to have been positive, especially the work related to the Self-Review document. Colleagues worked on issues related to teaching and the development of academic activities and experienced satisfaction of working for a joint purpose. The visits of the Quality Audit were in most cases appreciated. The report from the Quality Audit was appreciated in some cases but a disappointment in many cases. Suggestions given of new positions were not realized due to lack of resources. Recommendations at the department level have been executed, but recommendations related to the faculty and college levels are not yet accomplished.

The Review Team strongly recommends that the Guidelines for External Reviewers Undertaking Administrative Departmental Reviews emphasize that recommendations made by External Reviewers should be sensitive to resource constraints (Trinity Colleges, 2004a, Appendix 15). The 18-month report should be submitted to the University Council and the academic officers for review. The time schedules of quality reviews should be extended to seven years with the provision that a shorter term might be required in some instances.

Envoi

The Review Team wants to extend special thanks to Provost John Hegarty, Senior Lecturers Sheila Greene and John Murray, College Secretary Michael Gleeson and Academic Secretary Vivien Jenkins for all their time and attention. The Review Team wants also to thank the students, the academics and the staff, the Department heads, the Deans, the Executive Officers and the Steering Committee for their time and attention. Finally, we extend our special thanks to Liz Donnellan and her colleagues in the Quality Unit office for their careful attention to all our logistical arrangements and for their tireless guidance especially during our main visit.

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INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(February 2005)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Irish universities are required under the 1997 Universities Act to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". For this purpose, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and all seven Irish universities represented by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake a review of quality assurance in Irish universities, with the participation of experts from Europe, the USA and Canada.

The review of all seven Irish universities therefore took place in a coordinated manner during the calendar year 2004 using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These guidelines were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish quality review. The process was designed to ensure that each individual university, the university system as a whole, and its stakeholders gained maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts. This methodology also ensured that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities were reviewed against best practice internationally.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of some 135 universities in some 33 countries during the past ten years. The tenth anniversary of the EUA programme was celebrated during 2004.

Under the joint IUQB/HEA commission, the EUA was requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision making and strategic planning processes.

It was further requested that these key elements be placed within an institutional analysis, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management and the university's ongoing development.

2. Process

Following a formal request from the President of University College Cork (UCC), the Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a team for the review of quality at UCC. This team was composed of:

- Hélène Lamicq, former President, University of Paris XII, France, as chair;
- Lee Fritschler, former President of Dickinson College, former Assistant Secretary for Post Secondary Education, Department of Education, USA;
- Bent Schmidt-Nielsen, former Rector, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Copenhagen, Denmark;
- Lewis Purser, programme manager, European University Association, as secretary.

The EUA quality review methodology is guided by four central strategic questions. These questions, which have also been taken adopted by the IUQB in its Framework for Quality in Irish Universities, are:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

The EUA team used these questions as its framework when reviewing the quality assurance process at UCC. These questions ensure that quality is examined as part of the wider institutional strategic setting and put into its relevant context and perspective. The four questions were familiar to UCC, since they are at the core of the IUQB quality framework to which UCC also subscribes.

The process for the review of quality assurance at UCC began after the preparatory seminar for all Irish universities on 20 January 2004. During this seminar, the EUA review team members met the UCC Registrar and Director of Quality Promotion and set the timetable for the work. UCC then appointed a steering committee according to the EUA guidelines, which was chaired by a Vice-President. All members of the steering committee were also members of the UCC governing body. The steering committee met frequently and, while the self-evaluation report was being drafted, conducted a wide ranging and open consultation process across the university. As part of this preparatory phase, the Council of Deans and the Executive Management Group undertook a SWOT analysis of the UCC quality improvement and quality assurance procedures.

As an output of this process, UCC sent a 30 page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to the EUA team in advance of the team's preliminary visit. This first visit took place from 9 to 11 May 2004. The SER was accompanied by annexes with detailed information on the Quality Review (QR) process. The EUA team appreciated the work done in the SER and considered it to be a good report. The team also received further relevant documents during its visits to UCC--, including the University's Strategic Development Plan 2000 - 2005, more detailed student data and updates on important recent initiatives. Generally speaking, the team was impressed with the overall quality of the documentation, being both extensive and analytical in nature. Following the preliminary visit, the team did not request any additional information, a rather unusual occurrence which shows how comprehensive the SER report had been. The team then came to UCC for a main visit from 10 to 13 October 2004.

During its two visits to UCC, the team had meetings and discussions with:

- President, Registrar and Vice-Presidents
- Deans and the Executive Management Group
- Director of Quality Promotion
- Self-assessment steering committee
- Governing Authority
- Student Union
- Staff and students of the Faculties of Arts, Commerce, Medicine and Health, and Science
- Staff and graduate students from research institutes in Biosciences and Humanities
- Staff and students from five units (English, Government, Microbiology, Office of Buildings & Estates, Physical Education & Sport) which had been reviewed as part of UCC's quality review process
- Central office and support unit staff members
- External and internal members of the peer review groups which reviewed the five units listed above
- Representatives of external stakeholders from business and industry as well as from the local community.

The EUA methodology required that that the team maintain a broad institutional approach to quality, including issues not directly linked to the formal quality review process but which can affect the quality of the university's work in various fields. As part of this approach, the EUA team insisted on meeting the various UCC Faculties and Institutes in their own daily places of work across the university.

The EUA review team would like to thank the UCC President Prof. Gerard Wrixon, the Academic Vice President Prof. Áine Hyland, the former Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs Prof. Aidan Moran (who retired from UCC during the summer of 2004), and all the staff, students and external stakeholders for their warm welcome and for many interesting and useful discussions during its preliminary and main review

visits. The team especially wishes to thank Dr. Norma Ryan, Director of Quality Promotion, and her staff for their constant support and attentions.

3. Institutional context for quality assurance

UCC is a medium sized university which has grown substantially over the last ten years, from 10,225 students in 1994 to over 14,800 students in 2003/04. The university is situated in the second largest city in the Republic of Ireland. Cork is also the country's main industrial and commercial centre outside Dublin. Founded in 1845, UCC has developed a strong regional identity and ownership, drawing the majority of its students from the south of Ireland and playing a crucial role in the life of the city and region. At a time when the overall numbers of new students entering universities in Ireland are stagnating, the percentage of students expressing first preferences to study at UCC increased in 2004 by 10%. The university is now seeking to position itself more visibly in the wider competitive national and international contexts.

These regional, national and international dimensions are enshrined in the UCC mission statement, which states that UCC will "create, preserve and communicate knowledge and, thereby, contribute to the cultural, social and economic well-being of the people of Munster, Ireland and the world."

UCC is currently strengthening its cooperation with other educational providers in the city and region, notably the Cork Institute of Technology, in order to develop a seamless spectrum of educational opportunity for all learners in Cork and the Munster area. This vision is shared and supported by a number of important social and economic stakeholders who are encouraging UCC to play the leading role in developing such opportunities.

UCC has a strategic development plan for the period 2000-2005, entitled "Agenda for Excellence", which emphasises the importance of rounded undergraduate programmes to develop essential skills and cultivated minds. At the same time, the strategic plan promotes strong postgraduate programmes with enhanced facilities to attract and support outstanding students. The "Agenda for Excellence" also emphasises quality improvement strategies in human resource management, recognising that success is largely dependant on the individual and collective performances of staff.

As a university, UCC is built around a traditional disciplinary structure, with a very broad spectrum of academic fields and disciplines on offer. The basic structural unit is the academic Department, of which there are 61. These Departments are of widely differing sizes, and grouped variously in Schools, Faculties and other units. Each Department is currently a cost centre and as such is competing directly for resources with other Departments in the same Faculty and across the university. For example, the EUA team was informed that each Department negotiates directly with the Executive Management Group regarding the recruitment and filling of positions, and deals directly with the Library regarding new acquisitions. All Heads of Department appointed prior to 1996 can stay in that position until their retirement, and currently over half of the Heads fall into this category. Some of these Heads may still be in place for many years to come. As far as the EUA team could ascertain, students and staff identify most strongly with their Department.

As can be seen, the current structure of the university creates a number of challenges for the longer-term strategic and daily operational management of the institution. These challenges have increased since the implementation of the 1997 Universities Act, which obliges universities to develop strategic plans and gives increased responsibilities to the President as Chief Officer and Accounting Officer. Various methods have been tried to meet some of these challenges, such as strengthening the intermediary structures of Faculties and the roles of the Deans. The EUA team was informed that the Deans now play an increasingly important role in the budgetary process, and have become the most important decision

making group regarding academic resources. However, the team perceived that the importance of this position did not yet appear to be fully understood across all units at UCC.

Faculty structures across UCC would appear to have developed heterogeneously, both in size and function. Some of these Faculties have not yet become the necessary intermediary level of reference in terms of passing coherent messages from the ground up to the leadership, or for the strategic allocation of resources across a related group of disciplines. The EUA team felt it was necessary to strengthen the capacity for intermediary action between the basic teaching and research units of the university, and the central levels of university governance. Too many responsibilities seemed to be Department-based, while not enough capacity existed at the Faculty level. The specific attributes and powers at intermediary level are however only partially defined, although a number of Faculties are certainly on the right path. This has consequences for effective decision making, as well as for the allocation of financial and human resources.

The recent rapid growth of UCC has made these structural challenges more evident and pressing. These structures, which have grown up incrementally over many years in response to earlier demands for teaching and research, have been further destabilised by unequal rates of growth in student numbers across the disciplines. Combined with the effects of the current resource allocation model, these structures also make it difficult for Departments to work together at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, for example to provide joint modules or to coordinate library purchases. There are increasing demands today for innovative inter-disciplinary teaching programmes and research teams. The current departmental structure of UCC no longer appears to offer a suitable framework for responding to these new demands in teaching and research. The university must change in order to guarantee its continued success and relevance in the years to come, and these current structures do not encourage such change or allow sufficient flexibility in responding to new patterns of higher education. The President has therefore asked a steering group to lead a consultation process across UCC regarding a proposed reorganisation of university structures, and to present proposals and recommendations for this in February 2005.

Notwithstanding these challenges now facing the university, the EUA team formed the clear impression that a large majority of UCC students are very happy with their university and indeed would recommend it to their peers. These students likewise clearly seem to appreciate the close relations they have with the UCC staff and leadership, and are full of praise for the campus, despite the need for further capital development and the current intense occupation rates of buildings.

The university has started a very ambitious capital development and buildings programme over the last five years, with many improvements to the campus. At the time of the EUA visits, a new building for medicine was in an advanced stage of development, and the construction of a new graduate library was at an advanced stage of planning. These, as well as a number of other recent developments, including a new Student Centre, mean that, despite the ongoing lack of space, the campus is a busy, exciting, as well as attractive place to study and work. The magnificent new Lewis Glucksmann Gallery, which was opened during the week of the team's main visit, shows that there is a clear vision of the role of the university in the cultural and artistic life of the city and region.

UCC has also taken a number of steps to modernise the teaching and learning process, including the introduction of a modular structure for all undergraduate courses. This has been useful from several perspectives, not least that of transparency, in providing better information for students, academics and administrators. However, it appears to have been implemented in a variety of ways across the university; the EUA team was informed that, in some cases, modules consist of 15 or 20 ECTS credits, representing one quarter or even one third of a year's work. It would also appear that, in other cases, groups of modules of various sizes have been "locked" together. In some few cases, previously existing curricula have been re-labelled along ECTS lines, without taking the modular structure into account. Such cases effectively reduce or remove completely any possible flexibility for staff or students and defeat one of the main purposes of modularisation itself.

The research and technology transfer work of UCC has also been upgraded in recent years, with the creation of the position of Vice-President for Research Policy & Support. A major element of UCC's strategy has been the development of research institutes and centres in selected subject areas, matching the university's main strengths and linked to national developmental priorities. UCC has consistently been successful in winning important research contracts through the national research funding channels. An important role of the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support is to support staff applying for research funding, in the preparation of proposals and the financial management of these.

While this strategy has been successful in terms of winning research contracts in specific targeted areas, the EUA team also looked to see how research is encouraged and fostered in other areas at UCC. Most research teams at UCC are relatively small, and the need to ensure critical mass and sustainability should perhaps be addressed more explicitly, also concerning the new institutes and centres. The team was informed that there were few organised opportunities for researchers from different disciplines to meet each other across the university, and there was a clear need for greater structure in the organisation of doctoral and post-graduate research programmes, bringing young researchers together to stimulate and encourage each other in their various fields of work. As the numbers of these young researchers and scientists at UCC continue to increase, greater attention will need to be paid to the conditions and structures in which they are working, starting with PhD students at which level young talent can be encouraged to stay at the university or otherwise.

The strategy for the development of UCC is ambitious. There is undoubtedly much excellent education and research taking place across the university. However, the team observed that the management structures and methods across UCC, in particular at intermediary level, did not yet appear sufficiently well embedded to ensure a clear link between the top-level strategies and the grass roots activities, mutually feeding one into the other. As in any university undergoing important change processes, it is a clear challenge to combine strong growth with evolving structures over a short period of time. However, at UCC the different roles of the various offices and committees did not always seem fully defined, and there seemed to be many university-wide bodies who felt it was their brief to cover everything and who operated on the margins of their core competences. For the EUA team, the role of the quality review process therefore becomes even more important, since it must provide the framework within which the teaching, research and other activities of each unit are evaluated against the university's mission, vision and strategy. The QR process must also ensure the data and feedback which can inform ongoing strategic management and lead to clearer and stronger decision making processes.

The quality review process is also important in that it provides a framework within which the word and concept of quality is being built into discussions at many places and levels across the university. No major changes can occur in open public systems such as universities without the benefit of these discussions. As policy moves from decision to implementation, previously hidden constraints will emerge, resulting in further policy changes, more or less radical. The discussions at UCC provoked by the quality review process will help resolve other wider issues through debate and experience. This process is now underway at UCC and can be expected to yield positive results over time.

The President has a clear vision, but the EUA team did not encounter many other visions of the future of the university and its different components for the next five to ten years. The team did not expect to find one shared global vision of the future, but a number of converging ideas which together would help create a common set of explicit institutional objectives for the mid to long term. This did not appear to be the case, making it difficult for the team to situate the quality review process. Without this shared vision, it is also likely to be difficult for the various components of the university to situate themselves. In the opinion of the EUA team, any shared vision of the future should be built on the wide range of competences which already exist at UCC and lead to an overall strategy for implementing the internal changes required.

The team therefore wonders what choices UCC can make in reinforcing its profile over the coming years, a profile which the team feels should be expressed more clearly than in the 2000-2005 Strategic Plan. In particular, the team feels that UCC will need to position itself more clearly in the new environment of modern Ireland, in the European higher education area, and further afield.

4. Quality assurance procedures

Background

The 1997 Universities Act requires all Irish universities to create an internal quality assurance system. This law also gives the overall framework for this system:

- evaluations should be conducted at regular interval and not less than once in ten years
- all Departments and, where appropriate Faculties, and any service provided by the university should be evaluated
- teaching, research and the provision of other services should be the subjects of evaluation.

Led by UCC, the Irish universities have collectively been working since 1995 to develop a common quality assurance framework. This framework was formalised in 2003 through the creation of IUQB, and ensures that the universities' legislative obligations are met and that the evaluations are undertaken in a useful and systematic way, working towards an internal quality culture at all universities across the country.

As part of this framework, UCC has developed a strong quality assurance process at the Department level and has initiated this process with energy and determination. Work began in 1998 when the Governing Body set up a sub-committee to lead this process, called the Quality Promotion Committee. This Committee is chaired by the President and includes members from all relevant groups at the university.

A six-year schedule of quality reviews was established, commencing in 2000/01. The process is therefore several years old now, and by the start of the 2004/05 academic year had reviewed approximately 40 of the 56 academic Departments, 17 out of 27 support units, as well as a number of schools, centres and interdisciplinary academic programmes. The pace of work has been intensive and large numbers of people across the university have been directly involved. The QR process has therefore become both visible and well known in a short space of time.

Process

The quality review (QR) process at UCC follows the IUQB framework in that units undertake a self-assessment, then submit themselves for review by a group of relevant peers, who then present a report on the work of that unit with recommendations for improvement. This report goes to the Dean, who can comment on it and can also influence the implementation of its recommendations. Following the review, the unit should ensure that the recommendations for improvement are acted upon on an on-going basis. The process is actively coordinated by the Quality Promotion Office at UCC, under the control of the Quality Promotion Committee.

The QR process is seen by the units as a demanding process, requiring a lot of investment in terms of time and effort, but which works well in a large number of places across the university. The EUA team heard many positive comments regarding the benefits of the self-assessment phase, gathering data about what the unit does, evidence about how it does it, and whether it works. The process of undergoing review by external peers was also reported as being important and useful. It should be remembered that for most units at UCC,

this was their first experience of both self-assessment and external evaluation. The process has therefore been taken on board by very many different units of the university and used in a variety of ways. Many of these units have adopted the process internally as a catalyst for change and development, while only a small number tend to regard it as an obligation which they must reluctantly meet.

One clear benefit of the QR process is that, through its participatory methodology and relevance to all aspects of work, it has brought together different categories of staff which previously might not have cooperated in such a structured and systematic way. The QR process has systematically included the work and role of the non-academic staff in examining units across the university, giving them a clearer sense of their place in the structures and providing better information about the work of the unit. This is apparently the first time that these categories of staff have been involved in such an exercise and as such is also most important; the EUA team was informed that this had been both appreciated and found useful by the staff in question.

Furthermore, the QR process has obliged units to look more objectively at their relationship with students. Traditionally these are thought to have been very good at UCC, but with little evidence to support this supposition. The QR process has allowed this issue to be approached in a more objective way. However, there has not been widespread success in getting students involved directly in the QR process itself; indeed most students at UCC would not appear to be aware of the process at all, despite the best efforts of the Quality Promotion Unit, the Student Union and other bodies. This may be partly due to the absence of a student evaluation or feedback culture at UCC – the team was surprised to find that there are no university-wide procedures for evaluation by students of teaching, courses or modules. There would also appear to be a generally low level of engagement by "ordinary" students in university issues: participation rates in the Student Union's own elections are very low and it can take many months to complete the nominations process for class representatives across the university.

The EUA team expressed some concern at the composition of the peer review teams. These usually include two experts from other Departments at UCC, including the review team chair, as well as at least two external experts, one of whom is often from another Irish university, and one of whom must be from an international institution/body. The Department under review nominates a panel of peer reviewers, from which the members are appointed by the Quality Promotion Committee. Only the chair of the peer review group is not nominated by the Department. The EUA team suggests that more external members be included on the teams, especially from universities outside Ireland. The team would also like to stress the need to remove any link between the Department under review and the choice of peer reviewers. This is necessary in order to maintain the independence and objectivity of the review process. The small size of many Departments likewise requires that peers be nominated by others, since such a Department's own pool of potential reviewers may in some cases be limited. The Deans could play a useful role here, or an expert external to UCC agreed by both Department and Dean.

The EUA team received mixed reports about the usefulness and success of the follow up activity after the peer review. Although this phase of quality improvement should be the primary goal of the process, not all units found this satisfactory or useful. The distinction may lie in the levels of expectations generated prior to the peer review, and to the types of recommendations and suggestions made in the peer review report. Little regard seems to have been paid by most peer review teams to the resource implications of the recommendations they made, nor of the relative priorities, when these were expressed, of the various recommendations. Thus in a number of cases the implementation phase has been difficult, if not impossible, and some staff have been disappointed. Clear expectations were also held regarding possible responses from the university leadership, and in a number of cases these were reportedly not met.

These expectations need to be more clearly managed in the future, and the terms of reference of the peer review teams improved to ensure that their recommendations fit realistically into the context of the university, also in a long-term perspective. It may also be useful for these recommendations to be divided into those

which require additional resources and those which do not. Whether resources are available or not, the university needs to respond to the reports and to show that the work undertaken has been noticed and appreciated, and will also feed into wider strategic considerations, even if the desired resources may not currently be available.

Other mechanisms

As in all quality-conscious universities, a variety of other mechanisms exist at UCC by which the university can monitor and improve the quality of its various activities. Apart from the formal QR process, these also include:

- The use of external examiners to monitor the contents of programmes and courses, as well as standards and procedures for student assessment
- Formal course evaluations for new academic programmes
- External professional accreditation for certain programmes
- Teaching quality promotion, including a series of university awards and incentives, and a recent high-profile initiative creating a post-graduate diploma in teaching and learning, for the voluntary upgrading of staff skills
- Research reviews and evaluations, including the development of initiatives to strengthen support to researchers in a wide range of fields.

This list is not exhaustive, and these mechanisms are well explained in the UCC SER. As already noted, one mechanism notably missing from this list is the systematic evaluation of teaching by the students, although this has been developed in some units over the last few years.

5. General observations regarding quality assurance at UCC

Since the QR process can be considered a learning process for both the university and each unit undergoing review, it is important for exchange and feedback to take place after each peer review report has been received. In particular, the university needs to show that the efforts made by the unit have been appreciated and found useful, and for the unit to place the outcomes in the wider institutional context. The university should also respond explicitly to issues which may have been raised in the report which cannot be met by the unit alone, even in cases where additional resources are not forthcoming.

A vital mechanism for quality assurance has until recently not been available at UCC or any other Irish university. Since the most important element in ensuring the quality of teaching, learning and research is the work of the individual member of staff, the use of a well developed individual performance management and monitoring system would appear necessary. The EUA team understands that the introduction of such a system is now possible in Irish universities, thanks to a breakthrough in collective industrial relations negotiations. This is good news in that it may help improve not just collective but also individual performance and activities. It may also bring in the necessary possibilities to offer increased incentives and rewards to top performers, or at the other end of the scale, the necessary sanctions for poor achievers. The only such incentive at the moment is the hope for promotion, and this can only happen when positions become available, which in some cases may mean waiting a long time. This situation was repeatedly mentioned to the EUA team during its visits to UCC, and has obviously been the subject of much internal discussion.

Interdisciplinary studies are an important element of a quality education. The team was pleased to note that inter-disciplinary work is underway throughout the university, indeed much more so than the team had been

led to believe. However, these endeavours are not always recognised as such, and since they do not correspond to current structures, are often being developed without coherent support, and on the basis of individual contacts and cooperation. Current structures constitute an obstacle to the more systematic development of such initiatives, and also to student participation; e.g. some departments do not allow students to choose small and relevant study modules or courses from other departments. This is also evidenced by the impression that most inter-disciplinary programmes do not seem to fit into the QR process and therefore have not been evaluated in the same way, although some reviews of interdisciplinary programmes have been conducted separately to reviews of departments and others are planned in the near future. The proposed merger of several groups of small Departments should be one way to help overcome some of these challenges. In any case, the team would encourage UCC to develop clear strategies for pursuing inter-disciplinary activities in both teaching and research.

Active international cooperation and exchanges are likewise an important element of ensuring quality across the range of university activities, allowing for formal and informal benchmarking, the sharing of best practice, the active exchange of ideas and methods across cultural and other boundaries, and the general exposure of the institution to alternative ways of thinking. These can add significantly to the quality of the work of both students and staff at a university. However, internationalisation is not mentioned as a policy in the UCC "Agenda for Excellence". The team considers that an important aspect of quality is to have and implement a clear and explicit internationalisation policy, including the internationalisation of curricula and the mobility of staff and students.

Discussions regarding student mobility at UCC left the EUA team with the impression that this was seen first and foremost as a tool for generating income from incoming non-EU students, at least in some Departments. Such an impression can also be obtained for the entire Irish higher education system from the recent OECD report. Despite obvious signs of increasing internationalisation at UCC, the EUA team detected an unequal drive to encourage Irish students to become more international in their approach and to include a study abroad period during their time at the university. Given some exceptions, e.g. Law and Commerce, the team also found little widespread evidence of incentives for internationalising study programmes or developing foreign language skills for students and staff.

There appeared to be substantial obstacles to increasing such international mobility, including the necessary funding. In most Departments visited, the team perceived a lack of knowledge of HE systems and developments in other countries, potentially leading to unnecessary complications for the recognition of study credits or qualifications of students coming or returning from universities abroad. The development of foreign language skills and competences does not appear to be stimulated sufficiently across wide sections of the university, despite being an explicit objective of the Strategic Plan. This may result in UCC graduates being disadvantaged on the European and international labour markets. Students themselves were only minimally aware of European-wide developments in higher education. The strong influence of the Bologna Process and the European Research Area in most European countries seemed to be a marginal issue in discussions about quality at UCC. This lack of engagement may likewise result in the relative isolation of Irish students and universities, and in continued under-exposure to multicultural experiences.

The current operations of the QR process have some limitations. One of these is due to the focus on individual Departments and units, as required by the 1997 Universities Act. While this focus is certainly useful for the unit in question, it may not necessarily cover in an adequate way some of the broader issues which might be identified by focusing on a School, Faculty or other set of units. Examples of this wider QR focus do exist, e.g. at the Faculty of Medicine and Health, and the experience has been positive. However, the reviews of Faculties, which had been scheduled for 2004/05 and 2005/06 have apparently now been removed from the agenda until after the restructuring process is completed. If the restructuring process is to help bring together groups of Departments, then, as one input to the restructuring process, it may be useful to address such groups already through the QR process, even if their exact composition changes later. Although there is a legal obligation to evaluate individual Departments, the continued focus of the entire QR process on individual

units only serves to encourage the assumption that these units will continue to exist as they are. Since there are currently 61 of these, the current process could also be seen as an obstacle to structural change.

Given the intensive inputs into the QR process, the EUA team had expected to find a more systematic use of the outputs of the self-evaluations and peer reviews. However, the team only found a few people at university level with a clear overview of the results coming out of the many reviews of departments and other units. There did not appear to be any formal synthesis or central analysis of these results either, nor rapid feedback to the different units. Given the abundance and quality of the documentation which has been generated, the team had also expected to find greater evidence of the use of these outcomes in the ongoing strategy of the university, especially for use by the Governing Body and the Executive Management Group. Although all reports are circulated on receipt to top university management and annually to the Governing Body, neither the EMG nor the Governing Body appears to be provided regularly with a usable overview of the results of the QR process, the outcomes of which should be seen as one vital ingredient contributing to strategic reflection.

The links between the formal QR process and other elements which contribute to quality across the university, as mentioned above, did not always seem clear to the EUA team. Many such initiatives take place in a variety of ways across UCC but resulting synergies did not appear to be as important as might be expected. All these mechanisms should, in their different ways, contribute to an institution-wide ethos of quality culture, in which staff and students are aware of the role each mechanism can play in improving the work of the university.

The team observed a certain disconnect between the QR process, the development and implementation of strategic management tools, and the incipient restructuring process. This disconnect is certainly linked to the planned timing of the QR process over a six year period, which does not allow for easy adaptation to rapidly changing external and internal factors. This disconnect also exists in other universities in Ireland and elsewhere. Whatever the reasons, this appears to be a challenge if the university is to be successful in making the fundamental changes which it is now setting itself. These three processes must be reconciled. At the time of the EUA team visits, they appeared to be running in parallel without necessarily engaging with each other.

For example, the team would encourage greater long term planning of human resources. Which positions will become available over the next five years? And how should these be used to achieve what UCC wants to do? Given that the current resource allocation system does not allow for much prioritisation or collaboration between cost centres, the distribution of positions is one crucial area where the university can have a long-term strategic effect.

Even with the current difficult financial situation, a connection must also be made between the QR process, strategic management and the resource allocation process. These three key processes are all currently operating on different timeframes. The majority of recommendations arising from the QR process and which do not require extra resources have been followed up. The balance between these elements is not easy to find but has to be faced. There is a growing risk of disillusionment by UCC staff and departments with the QR process itself, especially in times of budgetary constraint where resources for quality improvement are not easily available. The EUA team was made aware of very real and shared feelings of frustration across some parts of the university regarding the inability to ensure follow-up on some of the quality improvement measures identified through the review process, even in units where this process is recognised as useful and pertinent.

As acknowledged in the SER, the main weakness in the QR procedures at UCC today would appear to be an underlying lack of confidence in the process, owing in part to a lack of transparency in the handling of the outcomes and the recommendations of the reviews.

Many of the above issues can be addressed, at least partially, by improved internal communication across UCC. There would appear to be an urgent need to ensure better understanding of the precise roles and

functions of different parts of the university. As already stated in this report, it may also be useful for UCC to develop a vision of its ongoing development and goals which can be shared not only by the entire leadership team but also by a broad section of staff and students.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of these different observations, the EUA team would like to make a series of general recommendations aimed at different parts of the QR process and institutional development, and at a variety of levels.

- 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;

- 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;

- 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;

- 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;

- 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;

- Develop interdisciplinarity to strengthen research competences and to attract students to interesting new areas of study;

- Develop internationalisation and use it as a lever for change;

- Seek out and develop more strategic alliances with other Irish institutions and networks;

- Put in place a fully integrated management information system, and use it as a basis for strategic management and change;

- Examine further potential and more coherent uses of IT across UCC for the benefit of staff and students, especially for access to documentation;

- Make special efforts to ensure post-graduate 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.

Envoi

The EUA team would like to thank the University once again for the excellent arrangements made for its visits and work. The EUA team was delighted to have been asked to undertake the review of quality assurance at a university in such a process of change as UCC, and to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders the strategic challenges now facing the university.

The team recognizes the real competences which exist at UCC but considers that these are currently too fragmented across the institution for the expected overall benefits to emerge. UCC as an institution likewise needs to be more aware of the rapidity of the change processes taking place in European and international higher education. Facing these challenges successfully presupposes that the university community across UCC engages itself in the necessary organizational, structural and cultural changes needed in order to maintain and develop the university's own position.

The two visits have left the team with the impression that an enormous task has begun at the university. The challenge is great and the stakes are high. The EUA team is convinced that the university has the qualities and potential to reach these goals, and that the QR process can help. The team trusts that its inputs can be useful in assisting the university, and wishes the university well for the next stage of its development.

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(February 2005)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Irish universities are required under the 1997 Universities Act to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". For this purpose, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and all seven Irish universities represented by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake this review with the participation of experts from Europe, the USA and Canada.

The review of all seven Irish universities therefore took place in a coordinated manner during the calendar year 2004 using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These guidelines were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish quality review. The process was designed to ensure that each individual university, the university system as a whole, and its stakeholders gained maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts. This methodology also ensured that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities were reviewed against best practice internationally.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of some 135 universities in some 33 countries during the past ten years. The tenth anniversary of the EUA programme was celebrated during 2004.

Under the joint IUQB/HEA commission, the EUA was requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision making and strategic planning processes.

It was further requested that these key elements should be placed within an institutional analysis, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management.

Following a formal request from the President of University College Dublin (UCD), the Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a team for the institutional quality review of UCD. This team was composed of:

- Jarmo Visakorpi, former Rector, University of Tampere, Finland, and former Chair, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, as chair;
- Julio Pedrosa, former Rector, University of Aveiro, and former Minister of Education, Portugal;
- Robin Farquhar, Professor Emeritus and former President, Carleton University and former President, the University of Winnipeg, Canada;
- Janet O'Sullivan, executive development officer at the Haute Ecole de Commerce, Paris, France

The team came to UCD for a preliminary visit from 27 to 29 April 2004 and for a main visit from 19 to 22 September 2004. Lewis Purser, Programme Manager at the European University Association, stood in as team secretary for the main visit, Janet O'Sullivan being unfortunately obliged to withdraw for reasons of health.

In accordance with the EUA methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the preliminary visit, University College Dublin sent a 23 page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to the EUA, analysing the institution's norms and values as well as the quality assurance/quality improvement and quality management processes. This SER was accompanied by annexes with detailed data on students, staff, finances, various aspects of quality-related work at UCD, and the SWOT analysis undertaken in preparing the self-evaluation report. The EUA team found the SER to be well articulated, analytical, and easy to read. The team also received further relevant documents during its visits to UCD, including several complete series of QA/QI reports from a variety of units. The process of self-evaluation at UCD appears to have been open and extensive.

During its two visits, the EUA team held detailed discussions with a wide variety of persons, both from inside and outside the university community. These included:

- the President, Vice-Presidents, Registrar, Bursar and Librarian
- representatives of Governing Authority
- representatives of Academic Council
- the Deans
- the self-evaluation group established for the EUA review process
- student leaders
- leaders, staff and students from a wide variety of Faculties and Departments, including some units which had already been through the first round of the QA/QI process
- staff from many support units across the University
- representatives of external stakeholders.

The team would like to thank UCD and its President, Dr. Hugh Brady, for the welcome and hospitality provided during these visits. The visits and meetings were efficiently and pleasantly arranged by Prof. Alan Harrison, Director of Quality Assurance at UCD, who also acted as a very effective liaison person between UCD and EUA. The team would like to put on record the open and fruitful discussions which characterised the team's meetings during these visits.

2. Process

The EUA quality review methodology is guided by four central strategic questions. These questions, which have also been adopted by the IUQB in its Framework for Quality in Irish Universities, are:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

The EUA team used these questions as its framework when reviewing the quality assurance process at UCD, within the wider institutional strategic setting. This approach was clearly familiar to those the team met during its visits, understandably so since it is very similar to the QA/QI process adopted by UCD for internal use as a pilot project in 1995. This was the first such pilot at an Irish university.

UCD was also the only Irish university which had already undertaken an EUA institutional evaluation. This evaluation, which took place in 1998, was followed-up by a "senior management review" in 2003, independent of EUA but based on similar lines and building on the original EUA report.

The EUA team therefore concurs with the first sentence of the UCD self-evaluation report, which states that "UCD continues to be a leader in the promotion and operation of Quality Assurance in Irish universities".

The team was however aware that, given the change of President and other senior leadership at the start of the EUA quality review process in 2004, the timing of this review was not considered optimal for UCD. These changes, combined with the need to put together a new strategic plan and with other external elements such as the OECD review of Irish higher education policy, mean that the university has been going through a special period of intense change.

However, the team believes that this EUA quality review process may also contribute to the future development of policy and strategy at UCD. EUA's objective is not to produce a blueprint but rather to provide a supportive review of the university's own strategies and procedures, as identified in the documents provided

and in the numerous meetings and discussions held. This does not result in a judgement, and the results are in no way comparative. The review does not focus on any particular field of study or research, nor on any individuals or groups. The EUA methodology is therefore limited in time and scope, but we hope it may prove useful at this crucial moment in UCD's ongoing development.

3. Mission and vision

UCD`s current mission statement was adopted in 1996 and in the opinion of the EUA team is rather general, as indeed are the mission statements of most traditional universities. The vision presented by the UCD President in his inaugural speech (January 2004) underlines that fact that the university aspires to be a research-led university with excellence also in teaching, truly international in character but with a distinctive Irish flavour.

The EUA team wonders whether this mission statement is still relevant for the first part of the 21st century. This question was also asked during the 2003 senior management review process. We believe that this question should be given serious consideration within the university, especially at a time when the new strategic plan is in preparation and the university is undergoing important changes. The values presented in these mission and vision statements are certainly laudable, but it may be useful to say more about UCD's specific role in higher education in Ireland and which elements serve to differentiate it from the other Irish universities.

By way of example, not suggestion, the following ideas point to some elements which could be introduced to the vision statement, making it more specific:

- UCD is a comprehensive university covering all major disciplines, but sciences and engineering account for only 18% of the undergraduate students: this would appear to be a rather low figure when looking at the whole higher education sector in Ireland. What is the university's vision of its disciplinary balance for the future, and what does Ireland expect from UCD in particular?

- The change of demographic structure in Ireland is leading to a significant decrease in traditional third level entrance age cohorts. More than 90% of current UCD students come from these traditional age cohorts. There are, however, large groups of adults in Ireland who have not yet benefited from tertiary education, or who would benefit by returning to university to upgrade their knowledge and skills in a wide variety of fields. What is UCD's vision in this respect, and what can it do to address some of these important societal needs?

The institution's mission and vision define what the university is trying to do, and are therefore crucial in determining what strategies should be put in place, and how a quality assurance and improvement system should operate. The EUA team would encourage UCD to be proactive regarding these kinds of national issues and to express its views in its vision statement and strategic plan.

4. Student issues

The admission of traditional students is obviously well organised in Ireland through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system. Although the right to choose its own students is one of the main elements of a university's autonomy, it is well recognised that national cooperation in this respect is necessary and often better than full individual autonomy. However, the EUA team considers that the systematic recruitment and admission of mature students needs to be considered carefully by UCD as the context in which it is working continues to evolve.

The EUA team believes that one of the big issues facing Irish universities, not just individually but also nationally, concerns the types of students recruited and educational programmes offered, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In the opinion of the team, these translate into an increased need at UCD for:

- More taught masters students, aiming at higher levels of specialisation for professional purposes and at the re-orientation of graduates towards new higher-level qualifications and skills, possibly in other fields than their original undergraduate education;
- More research masters and PhD students, aiming at developing the research capacity and outputs at the university, as suggested in the OECD review;
- More adult education, as already mentioned;
- More international students. The present number is already high in Irish terms, and some Faculties, eg Medicine and Commerce, have had great success in this field. However, the possibilities for an English speaking society and university community are excellent regarding both EU and non-EU incoming students, both from well developed countries and from developing countries.

Student services at UCD appeared to be well organised and administered. The Team was pleased to note that student issues and opinions are considered seriously, resulting in the recent establishment of a new position of Vice-President for Students, in the strengthening of student support services at Faculty level, and in due consideration being given to the creation of a student ombudsman.

The EUA team noted however that the overall position of students at UCD appeared to be rather weak and passive. This may be linked to learning methods and attitudes inherited by students from the secondary school system, but the university needs to maintain its efforts, as it has been doing successfully in the past, to develop fully aware, active and critical citizens, as one of its central contributions to society. The role of student clubs and societies is important in this respect. The team noted that student influence and input into the quality assurance process was limited, and will address this issue later in the report.

5. Teaching and learning

The Teaching and Learning Board, chaired by the Registrar, is the major policy-making body in this area at UCD. Its deliberations inform management strategies, such as resource allocation and human resources. Each Faculty has recently appointed an Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning.

UCD offers a wide range of undergraduate educational programmes, which have been developed over the university's 150 year history. The ongoing improvement of these programmes and curricula is the main factor for excellence in teaching and learning. For this continuous improvement to take place, the following are necessary elements:

- Curriculum design and development
- Modern teaching and learning methods
- Course review
- Programme review
- Services, infrastructure and learning contexts.

The curriculum design at UCD is currently undergoing fundamental change through the introduction of a fully modularised, credit-based system. This change, although labour intensive during the introductory phase, will be central in developing more interdisciplinary education and in catering for more diverse groups of students, including non-traditional and international students. It is essential that this modular structure and credit system be coherent across the entire university, so as to allow for more innovative and flexible curriculum

design, from both the staff and student perspectives. The traditional structures prevailing at UCD, with large numbers of Faculties and Departments, will however make the effective and strategic use of a modular system rather complicated, and may in fact limit some of the positive benefits which this system can bring, both for students but also in terms of efficient and flexible organisation.

As in most traditional universities the size of UCD, there would appear to be plenty of work still needed to ensure modern teaching and learning practices across the whole institution. Large lectures in auditoria are still too often the norm in many fields, especially during the early undergraduate years. The UCD SER alludes to a generally traditional approach to teaching at the university, although it also makes specific mention of new didactic approaches which are being introduced. The team was also informed of an increased focus on improving the first-year experience at UCD. The introduction of the modular structure will require greater student guidance capacity to ensure young students make the best use of the flexibility this structure can offer.

The team would like to commend the approach taken by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, which offers an integrated range of services aimed at helping staff improve their teaching. These include mandatory induction courses for new staff, teaching portfolio development, curriculum design, course evaluation and the integration of new technologies. The team considers that the Centre should also have a more important research component, to enable UCD to identify and build on best practice. One concrete activity would be to analyse all the QA/QI reports from the various units for teaching and learning issues, and to feed this information into the work of the Centre itself. There would appear to be a general need for greater emphasis on the concept of student learning at UCD, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning can play a key role in helping teachers and administrators rise to this challenge.

At the request of their respective professional bodies, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and the Medical School are engaged in comprehensive reviews of their curricula and have moved towards problem-based learning. These developments, both in terms of organisation and didactic approach, will also require close monitoring and the experience gained could prove to be of great use elsewhere in UCD.

However, UCD is itself responsible for the accreditation of most of its own programmes, and the traditional External Examiners system plays an important part in this. This has proved over the years to be an effective external way to review and benchmark courses and programmes, including assessment criteria and standards. This system does however rely on the selection of these examiners being as objective and neutral as possible, and the examiners themselves being leaders in such developments in their field.

The evaluation by students of courses and course delivery would appear to vary widely between faculties: questionnaires and/or other methods of obtaining student feedback are not used systematically, and in many cases not at all. Continuous course evaluation is an important part of quality assurance, and one of the few ways in which large numbers of students can contribute to the QA process. Awareness among students of such processes at universities is generally weak, not just at UCD, but students should at least know that they can provide regular and formal feedback on their courses and that this feedback in used in a systematic way. The EUA team is of the opinion that UCD needs a common approach across the institution for student evaluation of courses, including the way this feedback, once obtained, is analysed and used for the ongoing improvement of the teaching and learning process.

UCD maintains extensive relations with employers and other external stakeholders, including a number of professional organisations which monitor the teaching and learning process in certain fields. Some of these bodies recognise and accredit academic programmes for professional purposes. These accreditation procedures look closely at the content and structure of programmes, and are keenly interested in the professional competences of graduating students. Some of these professional bodies are leading the way in encouraging a greater focus at UCD on student learning outcomes, a focus which the EUA team would specifically like to endorse. As the modular structure is introduced across the

university, it is also important to ensure that this is accompanied by a renewed focus on the outcomes of the learning process, not just on the teaching inputs. The EUA team would also encourage greater stakeholder involvement and feedback in other academic programmes as well, not just those of direct relevance to certain professional bodies. The experience of such systematic and strategic stakeholder involvement in other universities has been very positive.

A central element in developing a modern teaching and learning environment is to ensure that this is open to international trends and influences. This can be through both the curriculum content, but also through the critical interaction of staff and students with their colleagues from other countries. Both forms of internationalisation appear to be developing well at UCD, and the EUA team was given data showing that ever increasing numbers of international students are studying at the university. However, the documentation supplied to the EUA team did not appear to state anywhere the numbers of UCD students going abroad for periods of study or work, or the balance between outgoing and incoming students. This is also an important element of internationalisation, although directly involving smaller numbers of students. Related issues such as how well the credits earned in foreign universities are recognised by UCD also need to be monitored to ensure the quality of these exchanges and therefore of the overall learning experience for students.

UCD explicitly recognises the need for talented, motivated and highly trained administrative, technical and support staff. Their crucial role in maintaining and developing the quality of the academic environment is covered in an important chapter of the SER. This is significant since in many universities this is often not recognised at all. However, the EUA team was informed that improvements are needed in a number of service areas, in order to ensure the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. These include the IT system and the library, two areas where resources and infrastructure are paramount and where, no matter how good, there is always scope for improvement. There may be advantages to be gained in both these fields through closer cooperation with other universities or centres of learning in the Dublin area.

However, the most important factor in creating excellence in teaching depends on the teaching staff. This is the same in all universities: all means by which staff can be influenced to ensure the quality of their work are valuable. Although pedagogical training and development are important in developing excellence in teaching, motivation is even more important. Therefore the recognition and encouragement of good teaching is vital. One such way is the explicit inclusion of teaching performance on the list of promotion criteria. The EUA team would like to support the proposed teaching track promotion scheme as recently proposed by the President. This will need careful planning and implementation, to ensure that this excellent proposal becomes reality. A number of examples exist in other European universities where the idea was widely welcomed and accepted but unfortunately poorly implemented.

6. Research

Although research and scholarly activity could be said to be blossoming at UCD, characterised by richness in diversity, the EUA team was provided with a number of statistics which showed that UCD, given its size and academic diversity, was not as successful as some of the other Irish universities in research outputs and in attracting research funding. The reality today is that for top quality research across a variety of fields to attain critical mass, attract resources and gain visibility, an institutional research strategy is necessary. The UCD SER mentions the need to articulate more clearly the University's policies regarding research and to develop a system for research management. The position of research manager has become increasingly important, and in UCD this responsibility now belongs to the vice-president for research, with the support of the research management office.

The development of top level research in universities is certainly shifting from disciplinary-based research to problem focused, interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinarity is often expressed and accepted as an

intellectual goal in itself, but in reality it needs structural and cultural changes in institutional organisation. The EUA team would like to commend UCD for the policy and strategy aiming at creating leading research institutes in specific interdisciplinary areas, and for taking full advantage of the diversity of funding opportunities for these. The team is of the opinion that this strategy should take into account the specificity of the different research fields at the university, and be very aware of the need for the sustainability of these new ventures. UCD has traditionally been strong in the fields of arts and humanities, which is where undergraduate numbers are concentrated: new research ventures are needed in these fields also. The team furthermore encourages the university to ensure its own strategy in developing these ventures is given priority over the policies of external agencies.

The team encourages UCD to seek out long term strategic partnerships with other institutions in Ireland or elsewhere in the relevant fields. The Dublin Molecular Medicine Centre is a good such example, based on collaboration between two universities. This example appeared to the EUA team as being a potentially fruitful way to develop a world class research institute, making best use of the resources of existing universities in the same medium sized city.

The development of human resources is essential if excellence in research is a goal. A plan for increasing the number of PhD students and the ongoing training of young researchers should go hand in hand with the development of research structures. As mentioned by the UCD leadership, echoing more general comments in the OECD report, the number of PhD students is low, given the size of the university and its research ethos. This will prove a critical issue in ensuring the sustainability of the current research drive across the university, and indeed across Irish society. The role of research management will be crucial in meeting these needs, and specific training may be required in this field also.

It is essential to promote interest and excellence in research, along with a good environment in which creative and innovative work can be done. Success here will partly depend on linking research to the needs of society, as expressed by different types of stakeholders. Here, the EUA team found examples where, despite good intentions, there was certainly scope for better cooperation with the dynamic Irish and international industrial activity in the immediate hinterland of UCD.

The pursuit of interdisciplinary research in strategic directions requires an enabling policy framework. Fortunately, some elements of such a framework are now available in Irish universities, notably a provision for tenure-stream appointments to research-intensive positions and a recent legal provision to supplement, in exceptional cases, the salaries of such appointees by up to 25%.

The creation of interdisciplinary research institutes at UCD poses a set of new and challenging questions concerning their relation to other existing units, such as Faculties and Departments, as well as to the university management. Monitoring and evaluating schemes for these institutes need to be considered within the overall university framework. There would currently appear to be few, if any, links between evaluation initiatives in the institutes and the university-wide QA/QI process.

A further element of the enabling policy framework that the EUA team would recommend is for research units to "purchase" the time of scholars from their academic departments. This is important so that the departments can maintain the functions (especially teaching) of colleagues on secondment to research units.

Given the enthusiasm at UCD for these new ventures, the EUA team also wishes to emphasise that developing interdisciplinary research projects does not always require the establishment of fully-developed institutes. It is often desirable to begin less ambitiously with smaller groupings of research collaborators which may, after a successful period of incubation, evolve into more elaborate establishments, or alternatively, remain smaller and less formal, or even be disbanded after an initial period of operation.

7. Governance and management

The principal governing body at UCD is the Governing Authority (GA). The GA currently has 40 members, including external members. Since the start of 2004, the GA has been chaired by an external member; this role was previously played by the university president.

The EUA team welcomes the existence of a governing authority and the inclusion of external representatives on this. Many European universities are now also moving towards such a structure in an attempt to ensure greater openness and linkages with society; such a structure can also contribute external expertise, experience and strategic advice for use by the university leadership.

However, the team was surprised to learn of the relatively large size of the GA at UCD, together with the fact that several of the "external members" of the GA were in fact employees of the university, although officially representing external constituencies. The historical political representation on the GA was also surprising. The EUA team felt therefore that the current size and composition of the GA were not ideal in terms of offering strategic direction and oversight to the university.

The President is the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the University. He reports to the Governing Authority. The Registrar, Bursar and Librarian have statutory management responsibilities. Since his election in January 2004, the President has appointed seven new Vice Presidents. The portfolios are:

- Academic Affairs who is also the Registrar
- Research
- Innovation and Corporate Partnerships
- Students
- Staff Affairs and Administrative Systems
- International Affairs
- Alumni, Communications and External Affairs.

The meaning of leadership is well understood at this executive level. The creation of these positions, as well as developing the role of Dean into that of an executive officer, is seen by the EUA team as putting in place a system to ensure good management at the appropriate levels.

On the other hand some very traditional academic collegial bodies still exist at UCD.

The size of the Academic Council is 255 persons, although the EUA team was informed that only about 70 members usually attend meetings. This says much about the work and position of this Council. It no longer functions as a governance body because strategies cannot be decided or even discussed in this kind of assembly. Therefore, in order to cope with this situation, the number of committees has grown over the years, resulting in too many committees. The EUA team was informed that the President had recently suspended some of these committees. The team is of the opinion that it will not be healthy for the university if on one side the management structures are operating effectively but on the other side the academic governance structures are not. This will shift the power too far from academia to management, and Academic Council will no longer be able to provide an effective and timely academic governance counterbalance to the executive management team.

The same situation exists at the Faculty level, where the system is also changing towards greater executive functions. The creation of "executive deans" is seen by the EUA team as a good step to ensure effective subsidiarity. These deans need to be given greater responsibility for a variety of academic and management issues, including QA and QI across the faculty. One obvious problem is the division of Faculties into disciplinary departments headed, until recently often for lifetime, by a professor of that discipline. The number

of departments is thus very large, and such fragmented structures do not permit either effective governance or efficient management. In other European countries with much more conservative university governance than Ireland, the disciplinary department system was changed some time ago. Disciplines will continue to thrive without such departmental structures, and many opportunities for academic innovation will offer themselves in a more open system. The EUA team strongly supports the current proposals for a profound review of the university's departmental structure.

8. Finances

UCD's funding comes from fee income, grants from government calculated on input and output driven formula, research income and commercialisation activities. Uncertainty with regard to the level of core funding from year to year has impaired the University's capacity to plan strategically.

The University has been moving towards an output resource allocation model since 2001. This new model will be fully operational during the academic year 2004-05, and the EUA team would like to applaud this move. The team was nevertheless surprised to receive all data regarding students expressed primarily in terms of intake rather than output. Having both sets of figures, inputs and outputs, is useful in getting a good idea of the quantitative and qualitative results of the university and of its different units.

The University has a devolved management structure, with 10 Faculties now functioning as cost centres. Faculty Deans, with the Faculty Executives, have responsibility for allocating resources within their respective Faculties and for financial reporting to the Finance Committee of the Governing Authority. Funding is allocated on the basis of student numbers, research output and alignment with the University's strategic objectives. In order to encourage the generation of additional income, Faculties can retain financial surpluses. Faculties are then charged for central university services etc.

While fully supporting the need for devolved financial responsibility and to ensure that Faculties are cost-effective and operate efficiently, the EUA team wondered whether this extensive financial autonomy of the Faculties might make it difficult for the overarching strategic management of the university as an institution. This situation needs to be monitored closely, together with the use of existing funds for university wide strategic management and initiatives, in order to ascertain whether the right balance has been achieved.

9. Quality management

Background

UCD was a pioneer among the Irish universities in developing an internal quality assurance system: it started the Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement (QA/QI) process in 1995, evaluating three academic departments in that first year. In 1997 an Office of Quality Assurance was established, with a senior academic as director. The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) supported these pilot activities.

The 1997 Universities Act now requires all Irish universities to create an internal QA system. This law also gives the framework for this system:

- reviews should be conducted at regular interval and not less than once in 10 years
- all departments and, where appropriate faculties, and any service provided by the university should be reviewed
- teaching, research and the provision of other services should be the subjects of review.

Thus this legal framework is very similar to the system which was already being put in place at UCD. UCD's experience has also been central in developing the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and its framework for quality in Irish universities, published in 2003.

UCD is now in the process of reviewing the full range of its units, including academic departments, faculties and support services. Due to the high number of such units at UCD, a ten year schedule of reviews was agreed – the longest such schedule possible under legislation. By 2004, about half of the academic units (45), half of the service units and 4 out of 11 faculties had been reviewed, and the university was approximately half-way through the ten year schedule. Furthermore, UCD is in the process of introducing "mini half-term reviews" as follow-up for those units already reviewed at the start of the process.

QA/QI procedures

The Academic Council Quality Standing Committee, chaired by the Registrar, is responsible for the QA/QI process at UCD. It develops the policy and procedures to be implemented. The QA/QI process is supported by the Quality Assurance Office. This three-person office, led by the Director of Quality Assurance, Professor Alan Harrison, is the executive arm of the Academic Council Quality Standing Committee, and sees itself in a facilitating rather than in a policing role. It schedules reviews, identifies reviewers, provides support during the reviews and the production of reports, provides training in QA/QI techniques, drives improvement, liaises with internal and external bodies and is constantly reviewing the process and its procedures.

The Quality Assurance Office has prepared very detailed guidelines for the review, including separate QA/QI booklets for the review of different types of units: academic departments, faculties and service units.

The QA/QI process involves three phases, each ending with a report. These are as follows:

1. Self-Assessment
2. Peer review
3. Quality improvement

When starting the self-assessment phase, the unit appoints a co-ordinating committee representing all internal stakeholders. The QA Office appoints two facilitators from elsewhere in UCD, who are familiar with the process and with the University structure. These facilitators usually also act as chair and secretary of the peer-review group. The self-assessment lasts a year.

The peer review group (PRG) consists of the two UCD facilitators – who usually act as chair and rapporteur of the PRG, two or three external experts in the discipline/area of expertise and one internal member from a cognate area. Members are appointed by the QA Office based on suggestions by the unit. More recently, the QA office has also consulted the faculty deans before appointing team members. The external members so far have usually come from the UK and other Irish universities, with some also from the USA and continental Europe. During the review of service units, external members are not necessarily academic peers but can also represent customers or professional stakeholders.

The PRG makes one site visit and gives an oral report at the end of the visit, followed by a written report. A summary of the written report is sent to the governing authority and then, once approved, published on the Quality Assurance Office website. The peer review reports are more concise than the SER and include lists of suggestions for improvement.

Once the unit has received its PRG report, it must then produce a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Usually there is an internal implementation committee for that purpose. Once the Quality Improvement Plan has been

approved by the Director of Quality Assurance, the unit is supposed to implement its recommendations both at the unit and institutional level. The PRG report and QIP are also considered by the faculty dean and Quality Improvement Finance Committee.

Observations on the QA/QI procedures

QA/QI office: The role of the QA office is highly appreciated by all of the units that have gone through the process. Its involvement, mainly as a facilitator and a guide, ensures that the reviews do actually take place and within the anticipated timeframe. However, the follow-up to the QA/QI process also needs to be made more explicit, and there is a clear need for the QA office to be involved here as well.

Self-evaluation: The self-assessment processes are often conducted with enthusiasm and the reports are comprehensive. It should be noted that, up until now, this is the first time that units have participated in this process at UCD. Thus it has offered a first opportunity for a systematic internal examination of the unit and its functions, and for writing down observations and findings. Many of these were certainly known and discussed previously, but may have been so in a less coherent manner, and without necessarily being linked to each other.

The self-assessment reports produced by units and which were seen by the EUA team were usually very large – mostly between 100 and 150 pages, not including annexes, and rather descriptive in nature. There is a tendency for the SERs to be strong on information but weak on analysis. Certainly it is true that for units undergoing the process for the first time, the need to gather information was given more emphasis than would normally be necessary. If less emphasis were to be placed on the gathering of information, the different units could focus more on the analysis, i.e. how are they doing what they say they want to do, and how do they know it works. For this to be possible, UCD will need a greatly improved internal data information system.

Following its experience in the first round of QA/QI, one department expressed concern as to how to involve fully all members of the department. Only a small group of persons is needed to do the core work for the SER. While others can be involved through meeting the PRG and in developing and implementing the quality improvement plan, there was concern that some staff members might feel excluded or that their opinions might not be taken into account, or that others might simply not engage.

The role of students, especially undergraduates, in the process appears to be rather limited, and usually more as customers than stakeholders or partners. Postgraduate students are usually represented in self-assessment and implementation committees. However, wider student awareness of the QA/QI process is very low, and even when student feedback on teaching or other matters is systematically sought, the students do not link this to the wider improvement of quality across the university. It will prove difficult in the long-term to develop QA/QI as an integral part of the university's daily philosophy and actions if one of the major university constituencies – the student body – is largely unaware that this is taking place and of its significance.

Peer review: The input of the peer review visit is perceived by UCD staff to be both interesting and valuable. It is seen as supporting the unit's own findings as expressed in the SER, but also as being important in raising issues that have not been fully identified by the unit.

It is generally easier to assess the quality of research than that of teaching and learning. However, the peer review reports resulting from the QA/QI process do not provide much information about the quality of research undertaken in the units; this can be found elsewhere, based on well-known research evaluation criteria. The peer review reports can nevertheless be useful in identifying areas of research weakness. However, the quality of research should perhaps not be measured only by the number of publications, as

would appear to be the case at the moment in some units, but also by the impact of this research. This would require a different and more in-depth approach by the PRG.

The EUA team would like to express some concern with the method used for putting together the peer review groups. While these groups are constituted by the QA/QI office, they are based on names recommended by the department or unit concerned. To ensure an independent view it might be useful to involve a wider group of external peers, not necessarily persons already known to the unit leaders. In order to help with widening this pool, it might be helpful to establish a common database of reviewers for all Irish universities. While the use of two internal UCD facilitators in each PRG was certainly a helpful element during the early years of the QA/QI process, the continuation of this practice should be open to discussion. Having both the chair and rapporteur of the PRG from within the UCD academic ranks is good from an intra-institutional learning and development perspective: whether this is as necessary and useful in the longer term is questionable, especially if for the second round of the QA/QI process there is greater emphasis on benchmarking and strategic development.

Quality improvement plan and quality improvement: It is essential to highlight from the beginning that the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is the most important aspect of the process. Units spend so much time on the SER that they sometimes have little energy or enthusiasm left for the development of this plan. It must be clear that it is not something that is just tagged on at the end.

It appears to be well recognised at UCD that quality improvement is not simply a question of increased resources, and most of the Quality Improvement Plans set reasonable objectives relating to minor works, refurbishment, the replacement of equipment, support staff, etc.

However, a frequently mentioned obstacle to motivating staff to develop and implement the QIP is the lack of funding for the improvements identified in the quality improvement plans. Certain units feel disappointed when recommendations, validated by peer review groups, are not financed. Unfortunately, the State funding received by the University does not take account of these necessities. The university's budget for refurbishment of buildings is currently 0.3%. This is estimated as being eight times lower than needed. UCD often lacks the money to satisfy the justifiable resource requirements listed in the quality improvement plans.

The university does however have a modest Quality Improvement Fund, managed by a Quality Improvement Finance Committee and reporting to the Academic Council Quality Standing Committee, to which units can apply for assistance in meeting some of the resource implications emerging from the units' plans. This fund is however generally viewed as being insufficient (250,000 Euros along with another 100,000 Euros allocated by HEA). Interestingly, the Bursar insists that the funding allocated to the achievement of quality improvement plans be distributed on a matched-funding basis only. For example, in the case of new staff appointments, this money is often given as seed capital for the first three years in order to create some leverage. After three years, the department or faculty is expected to have generated the changes necessary to finance this item from its own budget. This system has the advantage of ensuring that quality improvement requirements coincide with the faculty or department's strategic plan and are not merely wish-lists. The departments and faculties can also bid for the financing of capital projects over 3-5 years.

As part of the new Resource Allocation model, it is proposed to allocate 5% of the UCD core budget to "Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance". If this proposal is accepted, it would be a very significant strategic step in enabling the university to build on the outcomes of the QA/QI process.

The Quality Assurance office does not have the resources effectively to follow up the implementation of the different quality improvement plans in all departments. If faculties are to assume greater ownership of the follow up and implementation phase, it would be appropriate to have a faculty officer with responsibilities for these, and for closer links between the faculty and the QA office. It is also important to stress that the follow-up phase should be fully owned by the reviewed unit, within a broader faculty structure. The dean therefore has an important role to play in coordinating QIPs and other developments across the faculty and making the

best strategic use of available resources. It might also be helpful if the dean reported regularly to the Academic Council Quality Standing Committee on the implementation process.

General observations. The QA/QI process is seen by those interviewed as having a high impact on teaching and learning and on the administrative processes at the university. It is positive in the sense that it allows units to take stock and spend time on reflection and analysis that they might not otherwise make time to do. It also provides an opportunity to focus on things that are currently not being done and to address traditional institutional anomalies. So far it appears to have been seen more as an enabling tool rather than an ordeal. This is most important. The process must be integrated into the functioning of the unit in order to see it as an opportunity for development. Having gone through the QA/QI process, some departments now organise a course review for their programmes every year via questionnaires for students. Those departments engaged in this process highlight the importance of feedback to teachers. This is considered key to the professional development of staff.

The QA/QI process is not just about identifying weaknesses. It also has a role of validating what the department or unit does well. It would be good to highlight these strengths more systematically and share this information and best practice with other departments. It would be useful if the documents were compiled regularly – maybe these types of documents could also feed into other processes within the university or faculty. It would also be of substantial help if units could rely on a centralised information system at university level. The current university information system appears difficult to use. The SER mentions that a software system is being developed to provide Deans with on-line information on students, staff and finance, but during its meetings the EUA team did not get the impression that this new system would be in place in the near future.

In order to achieve further useful synergies and -save on energy and time, the various bodies concerned with accreditation, professional reviews and funding which work with the different departments should also be informed fully of the QA/QI process. It would be important to agree on a common way of presenting data, background documentation and other issues. The School of Architecture is already working with its accreditation body in this direction. Such bodies also need to be informed of the timing of the QA/QI process, in order to agree on the appropriate timing of the various processes. It should be possible for one process to feed into another or to work out how both can benefit from each other.

While issues relating to support units and personnel often emerge in departmental or faculty SERs, this link needs to be formalised. For example, the use of the library is an essential element in any departmental self-evaluation, yet it is not necessarily included. To remedy this, the library has prepared a checklist concerning library matters that an academic unit should consider during its QA/QI process. This list is sent to all of the units under review each year. This model of best practice could also serve for other support units.

It is clear that no one precisely defined QA/QI system will suit all possible needs, and that some units will benefit from the process more than others. Nevertheless, a question arises concerning the distinction between the department and the faculty visits. Should the mechanisms be more different than is currently the case? Some deans wondered if the department review should not concentrate more on functions, while the faculty review would be more strategy-based. Ideally, the department review should feed into the faculty review, although currently some faculties are reviewed before all of the constituent departments have been through the QA process. It might also help if several units in the same faculty could be reviewed over the same period. The faculty review could then build more directly on these and have a greater focus on strategic planning. Eitherway, there is a need to resolve one issue which emerged during the EUA visits – that departments do not feel very involved in the faculty reviews.

Other quality assurance procedures at UCD

In addition to this statutory and cyclic QA/QI process, an important number of other mechanisms exist for promoting quality assurance within the university. Given that all universities have traditionally had their own internal mechanisms to ensure the quality of their work and their continuous development, the EUA team looked to see the links between such mechanisms at UCD and the formal QA/QI process. The team was somewhat surprised to discover that these links were rather weak, even at unit level; formally there appeared to be few, if any, connections. In the SER these other mechanisms were not mentioned in the chapter on QA nor explicitly linked to the QA/QI process.

The team found that the following quality assurance mechanisms exist at UCD, alongside the QA/QI process:

- The Annual President's Teaching Awards, which are based on peer and student evaluation
- Promotion to Senior Lecturer requires applicants to demonstrate their performance as teachers
- The Centre for Teaching and Learning provides a service for staff who wish to improve their own teaching and assessment skills
- The Personnel Office also offers assistance in personal performance evaluation
- Certain departments and faculties undergo external reviews, often by the relevant professional body, for accreditation purposes
- Programmes at UCD also undergo periodic review with a curricula committee; as part of this it is intended to evaluate all academic courses using student questionnaires
- The involvement of external examiners for each programme also helps assure the quality of the programmes both in terms of content and assessment standards
- Monitoring and evaluation of students' performance takes place at different levels, examining e.g. student retention and graduate employment rates
- The Faculty of Agriculture has worked with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, with support from the HEA, on evaluating modes for delivery and assessment
- Some professional bodies are also involved in the evaluation of study programmes, with the focus on improvement. For example, the Irish Medical Council evaluates undergraduate and post-graduate studies. Over the last five years, it has visited each medical school in Ireland twice and has issued two public reports
- Other stakeholders also influence quality; e.g. members of the Institute of Career Guidance Teachers receive a questionnaire from the Admissions officer of UCD to evaluate the quality of the literature the university sends out.

This list, which does not touch on any of the quality assurance mechanisms linked to research activity, is certainly not definitive. It should also be noted that, of the above mechanisms, most if not all of those which are obligatory look at collective performance. Those mechanisms which look at an individual's work tend to be optional. However, widespread and sustainable quality improvement in an organisation is unlikely without the opportunity regularly to review and discuss the quality of performance by individuals. The EUA team was therefore pleased to learn that new legislation is Ireland now provides (in fact, mandates) such an opportunity, and we encourage the UCD leadership to develop a performance management system for this purpose. This should be closely articulated with the QA/QI framework.

10. Strategic management and quality assurance

During its two visits to UCD, the EUA team encountered a general feeling among the university community that this was a time for change. There also appeared to be a relative acceptance of the need for this change. The publicity surrounding the appointments of a new President and a new senior management team has probably sent out the right signals internally and externally, helping to promote an expectation of change.

In terms of the change needed, there is a need to look for a rationalisation of the complicated departmental and faculty structure in order to avoid a lot of the existing overlap, to create synergies and to encourage the collaborative research now supported by the PRTLI and other sources. The EUA team would like to congratulate the President for his efforts to streamline the functioning of the institution by reducing the number of institutional committees.

The QA/QI process should be seen as a lever to support this change process. It is already serving to reduce the traditional suspicion between departments and to increase transparency within the institution. This is essential in an era when the institution is actively promoting collaboration among departments and faculties in order to attract greater coherence in study programmes and more research funding.

While the QA/QI process is centrally driven, it has not in the past appeared to enjoy the necessary support of senior management and governance bodies to ensure its outcomes are linked to the strategic management and governance of the university. There is no clear evidence regarding how the results of QA/QI have been fed into the wider institutional decision making processes.

While the Governing Authority is informed about the results of the QA process and must formally approve these, the EUA team learned that this is purely a formality and no debate takes place. Apparently the same situation exists at Academic Council and Faculty levels also, resulting so far in no general picture of the overall results of QA/QI, and no strategic follow through of this process. It is physically impossible for any member of the senior executive to read all of the SERs and PRG reports, given the high number of evaluated units and the length of most reports. It is a pity, given all the work that is put into the preparation and the elaboration of these reports, that they are indigestible to those in management.

As a result, the departments and faculties prepare their documents in a type of strategic vacuum. They tend to develop aspirational rather than targeted quality improvement plans. When targets do exist, they are mapping to department/unit/faculty objectives rather than to the institution's strategic development plan. This situation clearly limits the possibilities of the process to contribute to institution wide quality enhancement.

The challenge facing the institution would therefore seem to be how to link the QA/QI process into the day-to-day management of the university and its strategic development process. This challenge seems to be viewed by the new leadership as an opportunity and even as an instrument for management. There is a clear link to be made between the QA office and the recently created Strategic Planning office. The EUA team suggests that the link to the Centre for Teaching and Learning also needs be strengthened, as another major tool for change. These three offices could form the nucleus of a much-needed increased capacity in institutional research, providing essential research support for the executive management.

For the outputs of the QA/QI process to be focused and fed in elsewhere across the institution, the aim of the overall process must be clear. While stakeholders and society seem to feel that the university should adopt a strategic focus to its activities, the focus for the university community tends to veer more towards quality improvement and excellence. Departmental representatives voiced their concerns to the EUA team about how to strike a balance in order to satisfy these external and internal demands. These units have been made responsible for quality improvement. Yet they cannot be responsible for institutional change.

11. The future

Many of those interviewed by the EUA team felt that it would be a mistake to organise an excellent review process only once every ten years. The team agrees with this: ten years is too long a period for strategic planning and to gather structured feedback regarding quality across the entire university. The university recognises that it must move towards a culture of permanent and continuous quality. For this reason the concept of a mini-review, five years after the initial review as a mid-term follow-up, has been introduced at UCD.

Instead of introducing this new element in the process, the EUA team would suggest making the regular quality review process itself shorter and lighter, i.e. every five years, with a less onerous information gathering process (relying on a better internal information system), and with a much greater focus on analytical rather than descriptive material. This would permit the university and the respective units to have a more up to date QA system with less intrusive methods on a more regular basis – a basis which would allow units, faculties and the university to build logically from review to review, rather than waiting ten years by which time almost everything will have changed and the previous review will no longer have any relevance. This would allow for those documents (SERs, SWOTs, etc) from the previous review which are still useful to be updated, and for the focus of attention to be those issues previously identified but still unresolved, or new issues which may since have arisen. Faculty deans currently have a three year term of office, but if this changes to five years in the future, this shorter-cycle and lighter review system of both faculties and departments could be a very beneficial opportunity for those assuming this new function.

In the opinion of the EUA team, UCD should urgently consider revising its QA/QI cycle and introducing this lighter touch five-year approach now, rather than waiting until the end of the first round, that is for another four or five years, before thinking of changing. In this scenario, the team would also suggest connecting the reviews of departments to a framework for evaluating faculties, so that a department review can feed into the faculty review. This will also save time and effort, as well as producing more coherent internal processes and external inputs.

As an additional element, the university might consider introducing a specially adapted quality review capacity to respond on an ad hoc basis to specific unit needs at moments in time: for instance for accreditation reviews, executive succession/change of leadership, a particular student concern, etc. Such reviews should be much more flexible in their focus, maybe addressing groups of units grappling with one particular issue, or as part of the restructuring process.

Another possible way to link the QA process closer to institutional strategic planning would be to review university-wide issues, not units. This suggestion was also made in the Senior Management Review in 2003. The university as an institution has already been evaluated twice, not counting the current EUA quality review, and there is also experience of reviewing a university-wide service activity, such as computing. This model could be used more widely, reviewing for instance teaching methods, PhD programmes, internationalisation, etc across the whole university. Such an evaluation could be undertaken whenever there is a strategic need for one, not necessarily at five or ten year intervals.

12. Recommendations

In terms of mission:

- When formulating the new strategic plan, consider carefully how to position UCD for its specific role in Ireland, e.g. taking into consideration the disciplinary balance of the university, the type of higher education to be provided, and shifting the balance from undergraduate to postgraduate, adult and international education;

In terms of teaching and learning:

- Increase the capacity of the Centre for Teaching and Learning in its existing core functions and also in developing a more important research component, to enable UCD to identify and build on best practice;

- Use the recent experience from a number of academic units in undertaking comprehensive curricula reviews and introducing new teaching and learning approaches to foster such activities on a wider basis across the university;

- Encourage a renewed focus on the outcomes of the learning process, not just on the teaching inputs, across all units;

- Ensure that the modular structure and ECTS are introduced rapidly and coherently across the entire university;

- Implement a common approach across the institution for the student evaluation of courses;

In terms of research:

- Articulate UCD's policies regarding research more clearly and develop a coherent research management system;

- Increase the number of research students and fellows;

- Encourage better cooperation with the dynamic Irish and international industrial activity in the immediate hinterland of UCD;

- Link the monitoring and evaluation initiatives for the new research institutes to the university-wide QA/QI process;

In terms of governance:

- Explore options for adapting both the size and composition of the Governing Authority, in order to provide the university with more suitable strategic direction and oversight;

- Ensure an effective and functional Academic Council in order to provide an effective and timely academic governance counterbalance to the executive management team;

- Use the QA/QI process and results, together with an increased institutional research capacity, to support strategic planning and actions;

- Entrust greater responsibility to the deans for a variety of academic and management issues, including QA and QI across each faculty;

- Use both input and output measures when developing a new resource allocation model;

- Monitor student and other mobility not only in terms of incoming persons but also UCD students and staff going abroad for periods of study or work;

In terms of quality assurance and quality improvement

- Examine the potential for linking the QA office, the Strategic Planning office and the Centre for Teaching and Learning as the nucleus of a much-needed increased capacity in institutional research, providing essential research support for the executive management;

- Examine options for giving faculties and deans greater ownership of the QA/QI process, including influencing the choice of peers, and greater responsibility for the follow up and implementation phases;

- Connect the reviews of departments to a framework for evaluating faculties, so that a departmental review can feed into the faculty review;

- Urgently consider options for developing a greatly improved internal data information system, and use it to feed the QA/QI process;

- Consider options for making the regular quality review process shorter and lighter, i.e. every five years, with a less onerous information gathering process (relying on an improved information system), with a much greater focus on analytical rather than descriptive material;

- Establish links between the QA/QI process and the many other QA mechanisms which exist at UCD, and ensure academic and support staff are aware of these in their daily work;

- Ensure reviews of academic units also cover that unit's use of relevant services, such as the library;

- Ensure that regular analysis is made of the results of QA/QI activities in order to obtain an overall view of developments;

- Ensure that the results of QA/QI activities are fed into the wider institutional decision making processes;

- To ensure an independent view, it might be useful to involve a wider group of external peers, not necessarily persons already known to the unit leaders

- Take steps to ensure that the student body becomes progressively more aware of the QA/QI process and contributes to this;

- Develop a performance management system for individual staff members and articulate this closely with the QA/QI framework;

- Explore options for synergies between professional accreditation procedures and the QA/QI process;

- Consider introducing a specially adapted quality review capacity to respond on an ad hoc basis to specific unit needs at moments in time;

- Consider introducing a specially adapted quality review capacity to review university-wide issues, not units.

Envoi

The EUA team wishes to thank the University once again for the excellent arrangements made for its visits and work. It was a pleasure to be in Dublin and to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders the strategic challenges now facing UCD and the role of the quality assurance system in meeting these. As noted at the start of this report, the EUA review took place at a rather turbulent time for Irish higher education, especially so for UCD. We hope that the university finds our comments and suggestions helpful, and we wish the university well for the next stage of its development.

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

(November 2004)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Irish universities are required under the 1997 Universities Act to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years". For this purpose, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and all seven Irish universities represented by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake this review with the participation of experts from Europe, the USA and Canada.

The review of all seven Irish universities took place in a coordinated manner during the calendar year 2004, using the EUA institutional review methodology and guidelines. These guidelines were specially fine-tuned to meet the specific requirements of the Irish quality review. The process is designed to ensure that each individual university, the university system as a whole, and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts. This methodology also ensures that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities are reviewed against best practice internationally.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance having conducted institutional reviews of some 135 universities in 33 countries during the past ten years. The tenth anniversary of the EUA programme was celebrated during 2004.

Under the joint IUQB/HEA commission, the EUA was requested to report on the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in each university and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of the university's overall institutional decision making and strategic planning.

It was further requested that these key elements should be placed within an institutional analysis, allowing the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management.

EUA institutional reviews are usually based on an agreement between the university and the EUA, although there have been cases where the state authorities have accepted an EUA evaluation or review as part of a national quality assurance programme, without any special terms of reference. In the case of the Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities, the HEA is clearly also an interested party.

2. Process

Following a formal request by the President of the University of Limerick (UL), the Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a team for the review of quality at UL. This team was composed of:

- Henrik Toft Jensen, Rector, University of Roskilde, Denmark, as chair;
- James Downey, former President, University of Waterloo, Canada;
- Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, Greifswald University, Germany;
- Lewis Purser, Programme Manager at the European University Association, as secretary.

The Team came to UL for a preliminary visit from 3-5 May 2004 and for a main visit from 25-28 October 2004.

The EUA quality review methodology is guided by four central strategic questions. These questions, which have also been adopted by the IUQB in its Framework for Quality in Irish Universities, and which ensure that quality is examined within its wider institutional context, are:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How does the university change in order to improve?

In accordance with the EUA methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the preliminary visit, the University of Limerick sent a 24 page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to the EUA team, analysing the institutional context, norms and values, its quality monitoring and quality management, as well as its strategic management and capacity for change. This SER was accompanied by detailed annexes. The EUA Team appreciated the work done in the SER and considered it to be an excellent report. The team also received further relevant documents during its visits to UL--, including the University's Strategic Plan 2001-2006, and reports and general presentational material from some of the Departments and service units.

For its main visit, the Team requested some additional documentation regarding UL's mechanisms for promoting new initiatives, the roles of the course boards, and the university's responsiveness to some of the governance and management issues related to the implementation of quality. These issues were discussed during the preliminary visit but not fully reflected in the SER. This additional information was provided in advance of the main visit and covered the issues adequately.

During its two visits, the EUA team held detailed discussions with a wide variety of persons, both from inside and outside the university community. These included:

- the UL President and Vice-Presidents;
- the Chair of the UL Governing Authority;
- the self-evaluation group established for the EUA review process;
- the Deans' Council and Executive Committee;
- central university staff responsible inter alia for the promotion of quality, teaching and learning, administration, buildings, research, international education, cooperative education and careers, human resources;
- a cross-section of assistant Deans for academic affairs and course directors;
- the Students' Union leaders;
- leaders, staff and students from seven Departments (maths and statistics, mechanical and aeronautical engineering, education and professional studies, economics, sociology, nursing, life sciences);
- leaders, staff and researchers from two major research centres (materials and surface science, software engineering);
- representatives of UL stakeholders and partners in society.

The team would like to thank UL and its President, Prof. Roger Downer, for the welcome and hospitality provided during its two visits. Both visits and all meetings were efficiently and pleasantly arranged by Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality, who also acted as a very effective liaison person between UL and EUA.

The team would also like to put on record the open manner in which it was received across all parts of UL and the frank discussions which characterised the team's meetings. During these meetings the team was able to discuss a very wide range of issues linked to the ongoing development of UL and the role of the quality review process in this.

3. General context for Quality Assurance

The EUA team received very many positive general impressions during its visits to the University of Limerick, all of which provide an important backdrop to quality assurance and quality management activities at the university.

The team was struck by the energy and enthusiasm of the vast majority of UL staff and students whom it met. Given that the success of any university rests on the commitment and quality of its staff and students, this augurs well for the future of UL.

UL as an institution is little over 30 years of age, and as a university is 15 years old. The fact that such a body of staff undertaking such a wide range of teaching, research and other activities represents a huge achievement over these relatively short time scales. The EUA team was very impressed with the UL campus and the large amount of capital investment which has taken place over recent years. The campus, including teaching and learning as well as sporting and cultural facilities, was regarded with pride by all university members, not least by the students, with whom the team met.

Great efforts have been put into developing well-functioning support schemes for teaching and learning, aimed at both students and staff. This is a sign that the university takes these activities seriously, and is committed to the continuous improvement of quality in these fields.

The EUA team was given details regarding the rapid internationalisation of life at UL. Active international cooperation and exchanges are an important element of ensuring quality in a modern university, allowing for formal and informal benchmarking and the sharing of best practice across a range of teaching and research activities, the active exchange of ideas and methods across cultural and other boundaries, and the general exposure of the institution to alternative ways of thinking. These can add significantly to the quality of the work of both students and staff at a university. Student and staff exchange figures at UL, while still relatively modest in real terms, have increased substantially over the last ten years, and a new international education strategy is currently being put in place, e.g. with UL taking on a leading role in the Luxembourg-based project Campus Europae. While UL sends fewer outgoing students for periods of study abroad than it receives incoming students, many UL students also obtain international experience and exposure through the Cooperative Education programme, which is an integral part of each student's experience at UL.

The Cooperative Education system at UL also provides a direct link for each student between the world of learning and the world of work, and as such gives the student a better understanding of the links between these two spheres and better opportunities for making a successful transition once he or she has left the university. This system has been a strength of UL over the past number of years and contributed substantially to the university's strong visibility and reputation regionally, nationally, and indeed internationally. It has helped focus attention on the outcomes of teaching and learning, and has contributed to a very realistic approach to ensuring the quality of these activities. However, the monitoring of student placements under the Cooperative Education system or other schemes, such as for trainee teachers, requires huge resources and has become increasingly difficult as numbers grow.

UL has developed an excellent network of local and regional partnerships with other economic, social and cultural actors. These partnerships have likewise been based on concrete dialogue and activities, and the spirit of these has permeated most areas of the university, resulting in a healthy view of the relevance of higher education, the need for a variety of perspectives, and a general openness to the external world. All of these are essential in developing a sustainable and institution-wide quality culture. The team gained an impression however from the UL senior management that the university needed to use its external resources and partners better in terms of developing and implementing strategy.

4. Governance and management

The principal governing body at UL is the Governing Authority (GA). The GA has 34 members and, as with the other Irish universities, its composition is defined in great detail in the 1997 Universities Act. The GA membership includes representatives of different categories of UL staff, a number of external representatives, two representatives from the Students Union and one postgraduate student. However, the recent OECD report recommends a general reduction in size of such governing authorities at all Irish universities, and proposes a maximum of twenty members, a majority of which should be lay members, that is from outside the university. The UL SER also raises the issue of the current large size of the GA. The EUA review team was surprised to find such a big GA and wondered how effective a body this size could be in ensuring the strategic oversight and governance of a modern university in a rapidly changing national and international context.

The 1997 legislation also gives an overview of the GA's formal functions; as in other universities with such a body, these are essentially supervisory. It might prove useful for UL to revisit these basic functions of the GA, since the EUA team learned that much time in GA meetings tended to be spent on operational rather than strategic matters.

A specific issue which was mentioned in the SER and brought to the attention of the EUA team was the current practice of interview panels for the recruitment of new staff at UL being chaired by external members of the Governing Authority. The EUA team considered this practice rather unusual and feared that it may already have led to situations where the recruitment of senior scientists applying to UL has been jeopardized; in any case the GA should remain free to act in case of an appeals process and therefore should not chair the recruitment process itself.

UL also has an Academic Council which likewise has certain governance responsibilities. The composition and business of the Academic Council are laid down in the Universities Act and follow a traditional academic governance model.

While the EUA team respects the Academic Council's academic responsibilities for all courses offered at UL, it was unsure of the complicated procedures for the development and approval of new academic courses. The process appeared to be very slow and cumbersome. The team learned that a very large number and variety of courses are offered at the university, and that each course should have a course board and director, although until recently some of these course boards may not have existed on a systematic basis. In some fields, the number of such courses, boards and directors greatly exceeds the supervisory capacity of the Head of Department or Dean. Many people at UL appeared to think that it would be a good idea to reduce the number of courses but to allow increased flexibility in creating variations within a course, and also for the names of courses, so as to be able to respond in more creative and rapid ways to needs expressed by society and to the interests of students, without overburdening the governance and management processes.

The strategic plans of most universities have a very important impact on academic issues. UL is currently in the process of preparing a new such plan, for the period 2005-2010. To secure a wide consultation with the academic community, as mentioned in the SER, the EUA team was of the opinion that there was a need for a more participatory process in preparing this plan. In particular, it appeared that it would be useful to include the Academic Council in various preparatory stages before the new plan is finalised and the Governing Authority when the draft strategic plan is ready. This would help in ensuring a better balance between the executive and governing bodies, as well as between the needs of management and those of collegiality. Such an approach would also certainly help concerning the necessary ownership and implementation of the plan. There is certainly a need for the next strategic plan to remain central in decision making at all levels.

As highlighted several times in the self-evaluation report and by senior UL representatives during the visits, there is scope for improving communication across the whole university. This has been a goal of the senior leadership for several years already, and many initiatives have been started, but apparently the challenge

persists. To the EUA team, there appeared to be a number of aspects to improving communication, all of which are important in developing a better common understanding of priorities between the senior management and the academic staff. One of these could be to emphasise the direct meetings between senior management and the Department level. While recognising that the President has met with each department to source input to the strategic plan, such meetings continue to be important in the phase of drawing up and starting to implement the new plan. Another could be to encourage better student engagement at the level of courses, which will in turn oblige staff to respond to university-wide initiatives. Linking undergraduate students to the UL intranet might assist here. A third, as suggested elsewhere in this report, is to ensure a more explicit link between resource allocation and strategic outcomes, which may encourage staff to pay greater attention to university issues. Better communication between the leadership and the university would in any case also improve the possibilities of creating further tools for the implementation of strategy and change.

A more precise division of labour between central senior management and decentralised College and Departmental management would also appear desirable. It seemed to the EUA team that the current budgeting procedure was complicated and created several layers of funding applications and discussions which were not all necessary. For example, all permanent vacant positions are recentralised by the central authorities, and several special development funds should be applied to at central level.

These initiatives are understandable, but it should be possible to find a formula for the medium-term allocation of numbers of positions to Departments. It should then be easy to find out which units of the university automatically should keep a vacant position at a given time. This would obviously not remain unchanged indefinitely, but would vary according to strategic priorities. It is likewise normal to have central funds, but these should have a significant amount of money in order to justify a university-wide competition. There seemed in general to be many rather small funds for similar overall purposes controlled at university level. The amount of effort implied in applying to multiple funds for very small amounts of money appeared to the team to be wasteful. The team was aware that decentralised entities also had some funds for e.g. staff development. The team would encourage the university to see how better long-term strategic use could be made of these various funds.

Generally speaking, the team agrees with the statement in the SER, repeated several times by senior management and departmental level staff during the visits, concerning the need for a better resource allocation model across UL. There appeared to be scope for improving the link between resource allocation and the implementation of strategy, and likewise between resource allocation and outputs, at College, Department and individual levels.

5. Quality monitoring and quality management

Background

The 1997 Universities Act requires all Irish universities to create an internal quality assurance system. This law also gives the overall framework for this system:

- evaluations should be conducted at regular interval and not less than once in ten years
- all Departments and, where appropriate Faculties, and any service provided by the university should be evaluated
- teaching, research and the provision of other services should be the subjects of evaluation.

The Irish universities have collectively, through IUQB, devised a common framework to ensure that their legislative obligations are met and that the evaluations are undertaken in a useful, improvement-oriented and systematic way, working towards an internal quality culture at all universities across the country. The EUA team commends the framework the Irish universities have put in place and the belief that autonomous universities should take primary responsibility themselves for the quality of the work they are doing, as expressed in the 1997 Act.

Process

The EUA team admires the efforts at the University of Limerick to create a well functioning quality review process for academic Departments and service units across the university. For the academic Departments, this process is based on the IUQB framework and, as in the other Irish universities, is based on an initial self-assessment by the Department in question and a subsequent peer review. The Department should then respond to the report written by the peer review team and draw up an action plan to address the issues raised and to ensure ongoing quality improvement.

Unlike the other Irish universities, the service units at UL follow the ISO 9000:2000 process framework, which is seen by UL as having a greater focus on service and being more customer-oriented.

The quality review process at UL commenced in 1998 and is therefore seven years old now. The process is managed by a dedicated Quality Support Unit, reporting to the Vice-President Academic and Registrar, and to the Quality Steering Committee, a subset of the Deans' Council. The pace of work has increased from reviewing two units per year at the start to six units in the 2003-04 year. The schedule of units for review seems to have been based on a more or less voluntary basis, with those units most willing to come forward being reviewed during the first years of the process, while the "less voluntary" units are now being addressed. According to the information provided to the EUA team, 14 out of a total of 25 academic departments had been reviewed by the end of 2004, and one of these had already had a follow-up review. Two reviews had also been undertaken for Mary Immaculate College. According to the same information, it did not appear that any of the 13 UL service units had been through the ISO 9000:2000 process at the time of the EUA visits.

The quality review process has reached across many parts of the university so far and become both reasonably visible and well known in a short space of time. It has also, importantly, been linked to quality assurance mechanisms and procedures which existed prior to the 1997 Act and which continue to be an important part of the university's quality assurance process. One very positive factor appears to be the emphasis on a supportive approach to quality assurance, as indicated by the establishment of a university Centre for Teaching and Learning and the good work since undertaken in this field. Another very positive feature of the process at UL is the effort made to involve all categories of staff. This has been one of the reasons for the relatively high impact on quality awareness and its contribution to creating a quality culture at the University.

Other quality assurance mechanisms

Alongside this formal quality review process, the EUA team was also informed of the other main quality assurance mechanisms at UL. One of these is the traditional external examiners system, which is obligatory for all taught programmes and research theses. In the opinion of the team, the culture of using such external examiners in a structured and systematic way is a good one in that it can help secure national and international benchmarking of curriculum, student performance and examination procedures. Of course, the usefulness of the system depends on the quality of the external examiners invited to come to UL, and the university should continue to satisfy itself that those invited are indeed representative of the universities and academic programmes against which UL would like to benchmark itself in the relevant disciplines.

Another important internal quality assurance mechanism is the initial approval of new courses at UL by the Academic Council. As already mentioned however, the procedures for this appeared to the EUA team to be rather slow and cumbersome. It should be possible to provide equal levels of quality assurance while at the same time allowing for the faster and more flexible approval of courses.

Once approved, monitoring the ongoing quality of the course depends to a large degree on the Course Board, which should ensure each course is kept up to date, relevant to needs and expectations and that standards are maintained. The EUA team heard of many Course Boards which were obviously doing their job well and ensuring high quality in their subject areas. The team also learned that some such Boards had only very recently been created, and that others had not, in the opinion of the Departments themselves, been as active as would have been desired.

In some academic areas, programmes are also accredited by the relevant professional bodies. This introduces an extra externally-driven quality management dimension to the framework, which however is not explicitly linked to the internally-led quality review process, although many aspects of the process are similar. It may be useful for UL to explore what synergies could be achieved, e.g. in terms of timing and documentation, between professional accreditation processes and the quality review process.

The formative evaluation of teaching is essential for effective quality monitoring. The team learnt that this system is currently being developed at UL and is supported by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. This form of quality assurance is undertaken on a voluntary basis only so far, although growing numbers of staff have shown their interest in participating in this activity. The team considers that the basis for this important system is now in place at UL and could be developed further and become of wider benefit, both concerning the number of courses monitored, and by placing the evaluation of these lectures and modules in a wider disciplinary and educational setting within the College or university. The team recommends that UL should now move from an optional system to one where this is accepted as standard practice for all teaching staff.

Student influence on quality

One of the major channels available for students to contribute to discussions about maintaining and improving quality in the basic activities of the university is through a system of clearly mandated student representatives at the level of each class. Many universities have these, and while the system can be difficult to maintain given the large number of classes and the rapid turnover of representatives, it remains an essential mechanism for ensuring formal and informal student feedback and communication at grass roots level.

The team was pleased to learn that this system of class representatives also exists at UL, and that the system was widely known and recognised as useful by both students and staff. The team also learned however that this system does not function fully at UL, in so far as it was informed that there were only "class reps" in slightly more than 50% of all classes. On verifying with students during the visits, it also transpired that several of these class representatives did not know what their duties were, and furthermore several of them did not know why they had been elected. The team is therefore of the opinion that the status of "class reps" should be improved through initiatives from the university leadership, in agreement with the Student Union, to improve the relevance and visibility of these positions and to ensure that these representatives really can contribute to discussions on quality at the level of Course Boards and Departments. The team was pleased to learn that some training for "class reps" had recently been carried out in order for them properly to fulfil their roles, and would encourage greater efforts in this sort of activity.

Course Boards are of course another possibility for student influence and student feedback on the basic activities of the university. Based on its findings over the two visits, the team believes that UL needs to strengthen the role and expectations of students in these Boards. It might be a good idea to generalise the situation which exists in some Departments and Colleges where the "class reps" also act as student

representatives on the Course Boards. The team was informed that where this is already the case, it has helped ensure that there are open channels for feedback from classes and courses to the responsible Course Director and other actors.

Another classical method for obtaining student feedback on teaching and pedagogical activity is through student questionnaires. However, the EUA team discovered that, although many such questionnaires had been administered, these were only used by a minority of the teaching staff, and that this was normally done in conjunction with the formative evaluation of teaching under the guidance of the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The team would encourage UL to take steps to ensure that regular student evaluation of teaching becomes an integral part of the university's system for monitoring quality, and that this takes place for all courses and modules as soon as can feasibly be organised.

Suggestions for the future

During the EUA review visits at the University of Limerick, the team formed the impression that the quality review system functioned well, but was also experiencing some growing pains. To overcome some of the challenges which the system as a whole would appear to be facing, and to ensure that it moves more resolutely to the promotion of a sustainable quality culture, the EUA team would concur with the UL SER in stressing that there is a need for more pro-active strategic management of the quality assurance efforts. The team therefore recommends the following initiatives concerning the quality assurance system:

- Establish a schedule for all remaining Department and unit reviews for the next three years. This should include the service and administrative units also;

- Develop a system to ensure that there is a quick and visible response from the university leadership immediately following an external review. This is important for both the Department and the leadership, helping to encourage rapid and effective follow-up by the Department, and ensuring that the key issues arising from the review are fed into critical management issues;

- Ensure clear understanding about the responsibilities for follow-up and quality improvement after evaluations. These responsibilities and their various levels should, according to the guidelines shown to the EUA team, be made clear in the Department's action plan following the peer review however, the team learned that this was not always the case and that greater clarity would be helpful. As a general principle, the team considers that the main such responsibilities should lie with the Department or unit reviewed, but some will obviously also be linked to other parts of the university, including service units and possibly the executive leadership. Quality cannot be a closed or narrow affair, but must also pervade critical management issues.

- Secure more precise terms of reference for the peer review teams, in order to avoid unrealistic recommendations. The EUA team was informed of recommendations which were difficult to implement because, for example, the context regarding resources had not been well understood;

- The EUA team found that the small UL quality improvement fund put aside for follow-up after the review could, in certain cases, distract attention from the real purposes of the review process and the responsibilities of the Department. While the availability of resources for the implementation of recommendations and ongoing quality improvement is certainly an important issue, the size of this fund and the few apparent connections between the outcomes of the quality review and the process for the allocation of resources from the overall university budget would suggest that an alternative and more powerful strategy for funding long-term quality improvement activities is needed.

- In connection with the above, the team felt that the university would benefit by creating more explicit links between the various developmental initiatives underway across UL and the outcomes of the quality review process. Clearer links between the results of quality review and e.g. staff development opportunities or course innovation would help strengthen Departmental ownership of the quality review process.

- Given that many academic programmes at UL involve more than one Department, or sometimes more than one College, the current focus of the quality review process on individual Departments may result in issues that are important to programmes not being adequately addressed during these evaluations. There may also be a need for external review teams to make hard choices about the future of some programmes, whether to recommend they be closed down or substantially modified. UL should therefore examine what options is has for undertaking reviews not just of institutional units but of programmes.

- The EUA team felt that there was a need to ensure that everybody at UL is aware that developing an institution-wide quality culture is much more than having a dedicated Quality Support Unit. The danger of having a well functioning and effective quality office is that it may be seen by some academic or service units as responsible for the quality process and its outcomes, whereas these Departments or service units themselves should be firmly so. A good practice recently initiated which could help avoid such possible tendencies is that Heads of recently reviewed Departments now make reports to the Deans' Council to ensure that the outcomes of the review of each unit are widely known across the university and feed into strategic discussions. This also seemed to be an excellent way to ensure wide understanding of the issues, while keeping the Department in the centre of the process.

6. Teaching and research

The team saw clearly that there is a growing awareness of the importance of research across all parts of UL, and that this has resulted in rapid developments in a number of key areas. During the period 1998-2003, the UL research budget more than tripled, and several high performing research centres were created in fields of strategic priority for both the university and for wider regional and national development. Research has an increasingly important role in the UL Strategic Plan. University-wide structures have been put in place to encourage this research ethos and guide the development of the research agenda, including the essential issue of postgraduate programmes and training for young researchers. The team agrees with this successful promotion of the research role and obligations of the university.

The team learned that UL monitors its research performance against the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, and uses a set of ten metrics in assessing this performance. The team would encourage UL to build on these metrics and use them also as the basis for annual research performance indicators, to gain a more systematic overview of research activity across the entire university, and to identify areas for special attention, encouragement or consolidation. In the opinion of the review team, publication activity should be given an even more important role in the assessment of research performance than currently appears to be the case.

The team would like to stress that if the focus on the research agenda is to continue to be successful, and if UL is to maintain its reputation for excellence in undergraduate teaching programmes, then the implicit links between high quality teaching and research will need to be made more explicit over the coming years. Teaching must continue to be given as important a role as research in staff promotion policies, and the best researchers should not be taken completely away from teaching activities but should maintain some duties in their home Department. The alternative is that the university runs the risk that research will benefit at the cost of teaching, and that graduate teaching will benefit at the cost of undergraduate teaching.

The team felt that the growing role of post-graduate students in developing research capacity and outputs at the university needed greater recognition, and that in some areas, special attention could be paid to the conditions in which these young researchers are working. Both UL and wider Irish society have a strategic interest in increasing the numbers of post-graduate students and their research capacities and skills, but the team came across a number of instances at UL where promising young researchers felt rather isolated, even within some of the larger Colleges. Greater critical mass could be encouraged by creating specific opportunities for postgraduate students to meet, to present their work to each other, and generally to be integrated into the scientific and research community at UL.

The team was informed by several groups of students that the space and the number of books in the Library were insufficient. While this is a common complaint in universities, it may have long-term implications at UL given the changing profile of the university, the changing nature of educational demand, and UL and national strategies to increase post-graduate student numbers in both taught and research programmes. The EUA team would also like to draw attention to the fact that further development in information technology will certainly be an area of expenditure for the new few years at UL, as indeed in all other universities.

The review team had a very informative meeting with a range of UL stakeholders and partners. These partners were proud of their links to the university and very aware of the university's contribution to the regional economic, social and cultural life. The stakeholders supported the growing awareness of the importance of research at the university, but were clear at the same time that the university should continue to serve the wide range of needs in business and industry across the region. In this respect, the review team would encourage UL to continue its policy of strategic engagement with regional stakeholders, and to maintain a leading role in strengthening research and development activities with these partners. In particular, the team would encourage continued strategic cooperation with the Limerick Institute of Technology.

As suggested in the SER, there is a need to improve the statistics and overview of research activity at the university. The team also felt the need for enhanced institutional analytical capacity regarding UL itself: benchmarking best practice, reconnaissance, etc. This should build on and bring together in a more strategic way the many fine information gathering and analytical initiatives already underway across different fields of the university, making such information available as one form of strategic input to aide decision making by governance and management bodies.

7. Staff development

The most important resource for the sustainable improvement of quality in any university is its staff. For this reason, a coherent staff development policy is essential in a long-term approach to quality. While collective actions have been undertaken in the past, and most of the existing quality assurance mechanisms at UL operate at the collective level, the EUA team learned that the systematic monitoring of an individual's performance was not possible until recently.

Under new collective agreements affecting all Irish universities, the team would like to support UL's plans, as mentioned in the SER, to hold individual staff performance and development talks between each member of staff and the head of the relevant Department, concerning research and teaching performance. As already mentioned in this report as well as in the SER, the team would like to stress that teaching as well as research and service to society should all be important factors in staff promotion policy.

However, due to tradition, the research and teaching performance of individual staff members is not currently known to most heads of Department or Deans. In the team's opinion, this creates a situation in which it is rather difficult for the Head of Department to fulfil his or her duty in inspiring the staff and promoting quality across the Department.

The new system involving performance and development talks will necessitate training in these skills for heads of Department. This, together with the need for being pro-active in promoting the Department's activities, calls for several training initiatives for heads of Departments and Deans. The Human Resource department should, together with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, develop initiatives to meet these emerging needs. The team learned that some initial training for heads of Department was in the process of being developed, and would like to encourage this.

A fully integrated management information system is also a precondition for the Human Resource department, Deans and senior management to operate effectively and act quickly when opportunities and needs arise. The team was informed that UL currently does not have such a system. The team therefore agrees that the university urgently needs a specially tailored management information system, and encourages those already developing this system to ensure it meets the wide strategic needs of the university.

8. Recommendations

In terms of the quality review process

- Establish a schedule for all remaining Department and unit reviews for the next three years.

- Ensure that the regular student evaluation of teaching becomes an integral part of the university's system for monitoring quality.

- Ensure that there is a quick and visible response from the university leadership immediately following an external review.

- Secure more precise terms of reference for the peer review teams, in order to avoid unrealistic recommendations.

- Examine options available for undertaking reviews not just of units but of programmes.

- Explore what synergies could be achieved between the quality review process and professional accreditation processes in selected areas.

In terms of quality improvement

- Ensure clear understanding about the responsibilities for follow-up and quality improvement after evaluations.

- Create greater flexibility in resource allocation to provide positive stimuli for change.

- Merge several of the current small funds into a reduced number of larger funds, in order to reduce effort in applying to multiple schemes, and link the use of these funds more explicitly to the implementation of university strategy.

- Create more explicit links between the various human resource and investment initiatives and the outcomes of the quality review process.

- Move from an optional system of formative teaching evaluation to one where this is accepted as standard practice for all teaching staff.

In terms of governance and management

- Ensure that the Academic Council can contribute to the development of the next Strategic Plan and that the Governing Authority are consulted when the draft strategic plan is ready.

- Improve the status of student class representatives and their involvement in quality management.

- Examine options for these class representatives to serve on Course Boards also.

- Allow for increased flexibility in creating variations within Courses, including a simplification of the overall number and variety of Courses on offer at UL.

- Put in place a specially tailored management information system to meet the wide strategic needs of the university.

9. Envoi

The EUA team would like to thank the University of Limerick once again for its kind and generous hospitality, and for opening its doors to the team in such an honest and friendly way. The team has seen a vibrant university with healthy ambitions and good results, and was in constant contact during its visits to Limerick with many charming and enthusiastic staff and students who were proud of their university. The team admires the quality assurance system in place at the university, and has put forward a number of recommendations which it hopes can be used to develop this system further, so the university can benefit fully from the big initial investments which have already been made. The team saw that the University of Limerick has been through a period of formidable development during its relatively short existence to date, and is convinced that it shows high potential to continue and surpass these admirable achievements. The team wishes the university every good luck and success with this further development.

**REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES:
HEA/IUQB AGREED PROCESS**

(March 2004)

Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities:
HEA/IUQB Agreed Process

1. Introduction

An extensive, independent and objective review of quality assurance in Irish universities will be conducted by the European University Association with the assistance of experts from Europe, America and Canada. The review is being jointly commissioned by the Irish Universities Quality Board [IUQB] and the Higher Education Authority [HEA]. The review is structured to accord with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the HEA concerning quality assurance under the Irish Universities Act 1997. The combined review arrangements are designed to ensure that the university system and its stakeholders gain maximum benefit from comprehensive evaluations by teams of experienced international quality assurance experts and that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities can be reviewed against best practice internationally.

The review is taking place in the wider context of –

- the Government's "strategic objective of placing Ireland's higher education system in the top rank of the OECD in terms of both quality and levels of participation",
- the Government's commitment to "support efforts to protect and improve the quality of academic teaching and learning at undergraduate level " (Programme for Government),
- Government's acknowledgement that "the challenges of maintaining, quality, responsiveness and competitiveness in higher education are a major priority against the background of unprecedented levels of expansion, change and diversification in the sector in Ireland"

The implementation of appropriate quality assurance procedures must be an essential part of any strategy to achieve such top rank positioning. The intention is that this review will support the Irish universities in the continuing development of their quality assurance procedures to meet the best standards and practices in the world.

2. Legislative Background

The universities are obliged under the Universities Act, (1997) to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures.

The HEA has a statutory function to assist universities achieve their quality assurance objectives; to review and report on the quality assurance procedures developed by the universities and to be consulted by the universities in their review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. The IUQB was established by the universities to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best international practice and to facilitate the conduct of reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and their outcomes.

The HEA and the IUQB have separate but complementary mandates in relation to quality assurance.   In jointly commissioning this review, both roles will be combined with the objective of achieving the maximum benefit for the system in a more timely and cost efficient way.

3. Review Process

The HEA and the IUQB have engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake this review with the assistance of experts from Europe, America and Canada.

The EUA has a strong international reputation in quality assurance evaluation having conducted institutional reviews of universities in some 33 countries. The EUA adopts a dynamic methodological approach to evaluation. It focuses on the universities' capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring, and examines if all the preconditions are assembled to make each and every institution more adaptable and responsive to the changing higher education environment at local, national, European and international level.

Under the joint commission the EUA will

- conduct, and report to the HEA on, an overall review of quality assurance procedures established by the universities, and
- in the case of each university, review and report on the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures and the implementation of findings arising out of the application of those procedures, in the context of its overall institutional decision making and strategic planning

The EUA review will examine the following areas for each of the seven universities:

- Design and planning of existing internal quality processes
- Effectiveness of internal quality processes
- Relevance of internal quality processes and degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic planning
- Perceived gaps in the internal mechanisms processes and frameworks and recommendations for enhancing them.

These key elements will be placed within an institutional analysis that will examine decision-making processes and will allow the review teams to comment on institutional obstacles and success factors for an effective internal quality management.

To complement the EUA overall review of quality procedures established by the universities the HEA in consultation with the IUQB and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), is putting in place a high level reference panel comprising eminent individuals from outside the university sector. The role of this panel will be to provide an external perspective on the social, cultural and economic context within which the Irish universities operate, and the procedures established by them in respect of quality assurance and quality improvement. The panel shall consider the outcomes of the EUA review and shall prepare for the HEA a "reflections" document which may identify particular issues of relevance to future reviews.

With a view to reinforcing the credibility and objectivity of the review process the EUA review teams will meet with the high-level reference panel at the commencement of the process and again prior to its completion. Both the panel and the IUQB will be afforded the opportunity to comment on draft findings of the review.

4. Outcomes

The University Reports

The EUA will provide a draft report to each university for correction of factual errors. Universities will be allowed two weeks to notify the EUA of any corrections. Following this period the EUA will assume the university accepts the draft as the final report.

The final reports are then sent to the IUQB, which then forwards to each university its individual report. Copies will also be sent by the IUQB to the HEA for noting, and with the proviso that it is work in progress.

The IUQB will require a response to the report from each university within six weeks.

The IUQB then prepares its own formal response to the reports and submits all these documents, i.e. the EUA reports, the university responses, and the IUQB response, as a package to the Minister (section 41 of the Universities Act).

On completion of this process each university will publish its individual report on its website.

The Sectoral Report

The EUA will send the draft sectoral report to IUQB and HEA for correction of errors of fact. The HEA and IUQB will co-ordinate their response on this and report back to the EUA very quickly.

The EUA will then provide a final report to the HEA and the IUQB on its sector-wide review of quality procedures established by the universities. Following consideration of the EUA sectoral report and the 'reflections' document prepared by the high-level reference panel, the HEA will publish the outcomes of the review following consultation with the IUQB.

Following consideration of the EUA sectoral report the IUQB will publish its views on the outcome of the review, following consultation with the HEA.

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

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