

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

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Department of Food Business & Development

Academic Year 2001/02

23 April 2002

Members of the Peer Review Group:

1. Professor Michael Haines, University of Wales, UK
2. Professor Fred Powell, Department of Applied Social Studies, UCC
3. Mr. Noel Martin Sisk, Registrar of Friendly Societies, Ireland
4. Professor Albert Flynn, Department of Food Science, Food Technology & Nutrition, UCC (Chairperson)

Timetable of the site visit

The timetable of the site visit is attached (Appendix A). The Peer Review Group considered that this was suitable overall. As a suggestion for the future, it was felt that more time might be allocated at the beginning of the visit to allow the Peer Review Group discuss preliminary responses to the Self-Assessment Report.

Peer Review

Methodology:

Because of their very close association the Department and the Centre for Co-Operative Studies were considered together for the purpose of the review. The Peer Review Group considered all aspects of the review as a group, Additional information was provided to the Group, including detailed staff student ratios and the external examiner reports. The report was drafted in outline before the exit presentation and was completed using electronic communication. The Chairperson made the exit presentation.

Self-Assessment Report:

The report was very comprehensive and addressed all of the relevant areas. It was well presented.

Findings of the Peer Review Group

Department Details

Current staffing includes 13 full-time academic staff (11 permanent, four of whom were appointed in the past year). A high proportion is currently at College Lecturer level. There are three full-time and one part-time administrative/academic support staff. The Department/Centre has an excellent provision of space in the O'Rahilly Building, which meets its current needs.

Department Organisation & Planning

There is an open and consultative approach to management and evidence of active planning involving all staff. There is a considerable administrative workload associated with the many activities of the Department and Centre. There is a flexible and mutually beneficial interaction between the Department and the Centre.

Teaching & Learning

General

There is a relatively large number of academic programmes with ongoing review and development of new programmes. There is a significant teaching and administrative workload, which is likely to grow with the development of new programmes.

Recently, student FTEs have decreased overall and this is exacerbated by the reduction in FTE weighting for postgraduate students. The Group also noted that the recorded FTEs take no account of the workload incurred through the substantial distance-learning provision that this Department/Centre makes. There is evidence that this issue is being addressed by the Department/Centre, e.g. (agreement with Commerce Faculty for access to First Year B Comm, development of new programmes). The need for marketing and promotion of programmes is recognised and is being addressed. It is projected that these measures will significantly increase the student FTEs in the short-term.

Undergraduate

There is general satisfaction among students with the quality of the BSc in Food Business and of its delivery. There is evidence of ongoing curriculum review, with student feedback taken into consideration. External examiner reports are positive. The BSc in Food Business is an innovative programme involving a mix of business and technology, and it has been strengthened by the recent inclusion of a six-month work-placement in industry. The undergraduate projects are considered a very valuable learning experience and have received very significant external recognition and awards for excellence. Deficiencies in access to computer facilities have been outlined. Recently, there has been a decrease in student demand for BSc Food Business as indicated by the CAO points cut-off. This is being addressed by increased marketing and promotion of the programme.

Postgraduate

There is general satisfaction among students with the quality of programmes and of their delivery. Overseas settings for project work are very valuable but not suitable for some students. Students would welcome greater emphasis on interactive teaching, including role plays, problem solving, case studies, group work and development of practice skills, and a co-operative learning model was suggested as more appropriate than traditional pedagogies. Students also emphasised the importance of regular personal supervision for research projects as well as the need for more emphasis on training in research

methodology before beginning projects. There is a serious deficiency in access to computer facilities. The fee structure is a significant obstacle to the recruitment of non-EU students.

Distance learning:

There is general satisfaction among students with the quality of programmes and of teaching. The Department/Centre are pioneers of distance learning programmes in UCC, and now offer a number of well-subscribed programmes. The Credit Union Studies programme, now a full degree programme, has been very successful and is widely recognised externally. The Diploma in Rural development has also evolved into an inter-institutional BSc in Rural Development. [The Peer Review Group was very pleased to learn that the difficulties regarding academic approval of the BSc programme which were brought to the attention of the Peer Review Group during its visit have been overcome since then and that the degree will be offered from this year]. The policy for resourcing of Departments for distance learning programmes is seriously inadequate, e.g. student FTEs are not credited to Departments for the purposes of calculating student-staff ratios. This is a significant barrier to the development of distance learning.

Research & Scholarly Activity

The Department/Centre encourages quality research by all staff leading to publications. The majority of academic staff have significant research activity, with a steady output of research papers and reports (many published in house, but externally peer reviewed, as part of a long-established tradition of the agricultural economics/business discipline), plus papers in peer-reviewed journals. Much of the research is of importance to the support of community, regional and national development, including many high-profile research contracts for EU and government. There is a significant research income in specific areas and there is potential for increasing this. Many of the staff are young and in the early years of development as researchers and have the potential to significantly develop their research interests further.

Staff Development

All academic staff have been encouraged to undertake PhD programmes in Universities with international reputations and all have either completed their PhDs or are close to completion, on schedule. Sabbatical leave is only available to a limited extent. The administrative workload places a heavy burden on administrative staff, and academic staff also increasingly share this.

External Relations

The Department/Centre is a model of the Skillbeck philosophy of interaction of the University with industry and the community, and gives expression to key elements of the University's mission as outlined in the UCC Strategic Development Plan 2000 – 2005, e.g. 'contributing to regional and national development, through research, teaching and

providing employment, in co-operation with local authorities, regional bodies, as well as with educational, business, cultural and professional organisations'. It has established strong links and a positive external perception for the work it does with communities and agencies and other educational and research institutions in Ireland. It has established links with educational and research institutions in Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA.

Support Services

Library holdings are limited due to general under-funding of the Library. The Department/Centre has developed important library materials from its own resources. Access to computer and related facilities for both undergraduate and postgraduate students is very inadequate.

Departmental Co-ordinating Committee & Methodology employed in the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report

The Committee adopted a very good approach to the preparation of the report, with wide consultation and opportunity for input for staff, students and others.

Overall Analysis

The Self-Assessment Report presented a detailed analysis of the Department/Centre and identified a number of issues which are important to its future development.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. There is a need for careful management of workloads of academic and administrative staff in order to ensure that the quality of teaching, research and research supervision is maintained and continuously improved. Academic staff are required to divide their time between teaching, research and research supervision, and a significant administrative workload associated with the relatively large number of programmes and services co-ordinated by the Department/Centre. Issues to be considered include input of staff time in relation to returns to the Department/Centre, course structure, streamlined teaching, e.g. suites of modules, as well as budgeting for appropriate levels of administrative support. Future developments need rigorous scrutiny and prioritisation so that scarce resources are not spread too thinly.
2. The Department/Centre should continue with its work aimed at increasing student FTEs and demand for its programmes, including increased marketing and promotion of the programmes.
3. In postgraduate programmes, greater emphasis should be given to interactive teaching, regular personal supervision for research projects, as well as training in research methodology before beginning projects.

4. Further development of research is desirable, including research of importance to the support of community, regional and national development. Staff should be encouraged to publish PhD research in Ashgate (*inter alia*) or in appropriate journals. Sabbatical leave should be used to a greater extent by staff to develop research. While not seeking to diminish the importance of the regular output of in-house publications, the staff should be encouraged to seek to publish more in international journals.

5. The Department/Centre should immediately address with the relevant University authorities the issue of inadequate access to computer and related facilities for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

6. It is strongly recommended that the Department be associated with the Faculty of Food Science and Technology for budgetary purposes. UCC is seen as a key national resource for the agricultural and food business sector, Ireland's most important indigenous industry sector, and the Department/Centre makes an important contribution to UCC's role in support of this sector. Adoption of this recommendation would strengthen the integration and cohesiveness of those Departments that share a strong focus on this sector to the benefit of the Irish economy.

7. The University should consider the potentially serious implications for the future of postgraduate education and research training arising from the reduction in FTE weighting for PG students.

8. The University should develop a coherent policy on distance learning. Important issues include the resourcing of the Department/Centre via FTEs or the allocation of earned income, by crediting staff for the work involved in distance learning via FTEs and staff-student ratios, and by infrastructural support. The Group is of the opinion that distance learning will be of increasing importance to Ireland, and is concerned that the absence at present of a clear and coherent UCC policy might impede this beneficial educational development.

9. It is recommended that the proportion of the UCC budget allocated to the library be increased from 4% to 6% (the UK recommended norm) in order to address the serious limitations on holdings of books and journals. The Group was dismayed to note, for example, that the library cannot afford to purchase peer-reviewed journals which carry prize-winning papers by staff of the Department/Centre.

10. The University should review the fee structure for non-EU postgraduate students in the light of policies in competing Irish and UK Universities, statistics for which show that UCC is losing out in attempts to recruit these high-quality applicants.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Group Site Visit to review

Department of Food Business & Development

Centre for Co-operative Studies

Sunday 3 March 2002

- 18.00 – 19.30 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.
Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified.
- 20.00 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department/Director of Centre and Co-ordinating Committee.

Monday 4 March 2002

- 08.30 – 09.15 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 231, O’Rahilly Building.
- 09.15 – 13.00** Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all department staff, including administrative / technical / support staff, as appropriate. Time will be allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.
- 09.15 – 09.20 Professor Denis Lucey, Head of Department of Food Business & Development, Director of the Centre for Co-operative Studies
- 09.20 – 09.45 Staff of Food Business Group
- 09.45 – 10.00 Informal meeting with all staff
- 10.00 – 10.30 Staff of Rural Development Group
- 10.30 – 11.30 Staff of Centre for Co-operative Studies
- 11.30 – 12.00 Administrative Staff
- 12.00 – 13.00 Professor Denis Lucey, Head of Department of Food Business & Development, Director of the Centre for Co-operative Studies
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group

- 14.00 – 14.30 Visit to core facilities of Department
- 14.30 – 17.00 Meetings with representative selections of students, recent graduates, employers, as appropriate
 14.30 MSc Food Business students
 15.00 Retail Diploma students
 15.30 Higher Diploma students
 16.00 Food Business Undergraduate students
 16.30 Distance Education students
- 17.00 Informal session with employers and past graduates
- 19.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day.
 Working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group.

Tuesday 5 March 2002

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 231, O’Rahilly Building.
- 09.00 – 09.30 Professor Brian Harvey, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support and Professor Pat Fitzpatrick, Chair, Academic Council Research Committee
- 09.30 – 10.00 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President and member of Executive Management Group
- 10.00 – 11.00 Visit to Q + 2, Boole Library. Meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Mr. Richard Bradfield, Subject Librarian
- 11.00 – 11.30 Professor Charles Daly, Dean of Faculty of Food Science & Technology
- 11.30 – 12.00 Professor Sebastian Green, Dean of Faculty of Commerce
- 12.00 – 12.30 Staff of Overseas Development Group
- 12.30 – 13.00 Professor Denis Lucey, Head of Department/Director of Centre (to clarify any outstanding issues)
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working Lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 14.00 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation, to be made to all staff of the Department and Centre by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. (Note: this presentation is not for discussion by the members of

the department at this time)
Venue: Room 201, O'Rahilly Building

18.30 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

Wednesday 6 March 2002

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