

**University College Cork  
National University of Ireland, Cork  
Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Department of Anatomy**

**Academic Year 2003/04**

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004

### **Members of the Peer Review Group:**

1. Professor Brian Jennings, UCC (Chair)
2. Professor Nollaig Parfrey, UCC
3. Professor John Bannigan, University College Dublin, Ireland
4. Professor Bernard Moxham, Cardiff University, Wales

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

The timetable for the visit is attached as Appendix A.

The reviewers considered the timetable to be adequate and to allow sufficient time for meetings with staff, students and other stakeholders and for a tour of the departmental facilities.

### **Peer Review**

#### **Methodology**

Professor W.B. Jennings was appointed Chair of the Peer Review Group by the University and Professor N. Parfrey acted as rapporteur. The external members of the panel, Professors Bannigan and Moxham, took particular responsibility for the aspects of the review and report relating to the teaching & learning and research activities of the department. All members of the panel were present for all meetings and discussions with staff of the department, students, other stakeholders and Officers of the University. These meetings are detailed in Appendix A.

#### **Site visit**

The Peer Review Group were shown the facilities available to the department, which are located in two buildings, separated by about 150 yards. The department's teaching

activities are located in the old Windle Building while the research laboratories are in the new BioSciences Institute. The latter facilities impressed the PRG, but the reviewers considered that the Windle Building is in dire need of renovation or replacement.

### **Peer Review Group Report**

The report was drafted in outline during the site visit and then finalised by discussions using email as the primary means of communication. The final report is an agreed report endorsed by all members of the Peer Review Group.

### **Overall Analysis**

#### **Self-Assessment Report**

The reviewers noted that the Self-Assessment Report did not completely follow the guidelines as laid down by the University and that the department had not fully engaged in all aspects of the process prior to the visit of the reviewers. The reviewers had the impression of a document prepared in haste. Nonetheless a clear view of the department's strengths and weaknesses was apparent to the reviewers. The panel felt that it had all the documentation needed to make a proper evidence-based assessment, although some of this had to be supplied during the site visit upon request from the reviewers. The review achieved a comprehensive picture of strengths, weaknesses and reputation of the department.

The SAR was lacking in some supporting information, and the survey data and analysis were scanty. Accordingly some additional material was requested and supplied to the PRG by the Department and by the Quality Assurance Officer.

The externs are Presidents of European Learned Societies and therefore have the international perspective. Professor Bannigan is President of the European Teratology Society and Professor Moxham is President of The Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Secretary-General of the International Federation of Anatomical

Associations and Immediate Past President of the European Federation for Experimental Morphology. They were convinced that the department has a growing international reputation aided by a recent surge in research activity.

Although the Peer Review Group was concerned about some aspects of the process, they had confidence in the validity of the assessment. The department had prioritised the statements in the SWOT and the reviewers concurred with the departmental assessment based on subsequent meetings with members of the department.

### **SWOT Analysis**

The department had prepared a SWOT analysis of the department. The reviewers formed the view that the department was able to be detached and objective and that many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the reviewers had already been recognised by the department. The reviewers agreed with most of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats acknowledged by the department. The most significant of these are referred to below.

**Strengths:** The view of the panel is that the staff of the Department are very committed to delivering high quality teaching and that staff-student relations are very good. The panel agreed with the Department that the B.Sc. Neuroscience Degree is a major strength. The Department is to be applauded on playing the lead role in developing this programme which provides good quality education and training in this important and developing area. This programme also provides the Anatomy Department with a pool of good quality graduates to support its research which has undergone a marked expansion as a result. The panel feel that student numbers on the Neuroscience B.Sc. programme should be increased if possible.

The quality of the students studying in the department is high and the reviewers agreed that there is diversity within the narrow scope of the research undertaken by the staff of the department. The reviewers noted the recent expansion of the space available to the

department and perceived this to be a strength for the department for the next few years. The panel were agreed that the members of the department are committed to developing the research activity of the department and are on an upward trajectory. The timely move to the BioSciences Institute is very important in supporting the department in their development.

**Weaknesses:** The department has perhaps tended to be somewhat traditionalist in their view that activities such as quality assurance are not of central importance. In a department which is undergoing rapid changes it is often difficult to see where advantages may accrue from the auditing of the process involved. However, as the process was worked through, it was clear the department was becoming fully engaged in the operations and discussions. The panel was in no doubt that the fundamentals of good teaching and good research are central to the ethos of this department.

The teaching and assessment loads of the academic staff of the department are very high and this is a weakness that should be corrected. The lack of involvement of staff in the formal process of decision-making in the department as identified in the SWOT is a weakness. The department has poor student/staff ratios and limited teaching using IT resources. Presently the department has not developed to a significant level the use of modern technology due to lack of resources.

The quality of space in the Windle Building is poor (unlike that in the BioSciences Institute) and the teaching laboratories and departmental rooms need renovation. The Windle lecture theatre is now too small to properly accommodate the medical classes.

**Opportunities:** The PRG agreed with some of the of the opportunities as perceived by the department. The principal opportunities identified by the panel were the possibility of expansion of the Neuroscience Degree programme, further consolidation of departmental research activities in the BioSciences Institute, further development of research funding including collaborative ventures, and in medical post-graduate education.

**Threats:** The Department is resourced entirely through the Faculty of Medicine & Health, but the Neuroscience Degree is based in the Faculty of Science and sources its students from the Biological Sciences pool. Although the scheme has worked reasonably well to-date, it could potentially lead to tensions over student FTEs and funding. Additionally the manner in which the Medical Faculty allocates resources to the Department does not seem fully transparent. The PRG felt that it would be better for strategic development if the Department could have real control over the finances available to it.

The PRG determined that staff members feel uncertainty about the provision of adequate space for their research activities in the medium term due to other demands for space in the BioSciences Institute. A guaranteed tenancy period would be helpful if feasible. However, the PRG were reassured by the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support that research active Anatomy staff need have no concerns about losing their research space in the BioSciences Institute.

The PRG noted the threats on quality arising from increasing administrative and teaching loads on the staff. The panel are of the view that the Department urgently requires additional administrative assistance (one new post) and a further member of academic staff.

The external experts felt that the dissecting room teaching provided by the Department was of high quality. There is an educational philosophy which tends to underestimate the value of dissection in medical training and urges its abandonment. The external experts urge that this should be resisted and that dissection by students be encouraged and supported.

### **Benchmarking**

The issue of benchmarking was not addressed in the Self-Assessment Report prepared by the department, nor was the issue addressed by the Department during the visit.

## **Findings of the Peer Review Group**

### **Department Details**

The Department currently has 7 full-time and 3 part-time academic staff, a prosector, 3 technicians, 2 part-time senior medical demonstrators, a secretary, an operative, and a house attendant. The PRG feel that in view of the teaching, examining and administrative loads at least one additional full-time member or academic staff and an additional administrative post are needed. The separation of the teaching and research activities into two sites is not ideal, but the Department is coping quite well with this situation.

### **Department Organisation and Planning**

The Department is functioning quite well as a cohesive unit, but the panel had concerns about the level of the involvement of more junior academic staff and support staff in planning and decision-making and the lack of regular formal staff meetings. The PRG also noted with some concern that the heads of all participating academic units, such as Anatomy, are not automatically members of the decision-making bodies of the Faculty of Medicine & Health. Additionally the fact that financial control of the Neuroscience Programme resides in the Faculty of Medicine & Health, but operational control resides in the Faculty of Science, could give rise to problems in the future.

### **Teaching and Learning**

The PRG were pleased to find that the quality of teaching was very good and that the staff had a very caring attitude to the students. Interviews with various groups of students indicated that student-staff relations were very good, though the panel noted with some surprise that there is no formal Staff-Student Liaison Committee in the Department as required by the University.

## **Research & Scholarly Activity**

The senior members of the Department have a well-established record in research/scholarly activity in the anatomy area and have an international reputation. Research activity and output of the more junior academic staff has recently surged as indicated by a significant increase in publications, postgraduate numbers, and research funding. This has been facilitated by the move to much better facilities in the BioSciences Institute and the availability of suitable postgraduate research students from the Neuroscience programme. Subject to national research funding levels being sustained the PRG see the opportunity to further develop departmental research.

Research Income: the peer reviewers welcomed and commended the recent substantial increases in research income and in the number of publications and conference presentations.

## **Staff Development**

Staff of the Department should be encouraged to participate in staff development courses organized by the University.

## **External Relations**

The international standing of the Department is tangibly indicated by the fact that all three statutory members of staff are involved in major leadership roles in international academic bodies; viz. Secretary and Assistant Secretary to the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland and the Society representative on the European Association of Anatomists and Chairman of the MFD/MFDS Examinations Committee of the four Royal Colleges of Dental Surgery (Ireland, England, Glasgow and Edinburgh).

The PRG commend the Department for securing a major international conference to be held in UCC this Summer under the aegis of the Anatomical Society. This should help to further raise the international profile of the Department.

The PRG noted the major leadership role played by the Department in the National Neuroscience Network and the scope for further collaborative research ventures in this area.

Within UCC due to its extensive teaching activities, the Department has interactions with a considerable number of other Departments in the Faculties of Medicine & Health and Science. The interactions with the Department of Physiology are particularly synergic and the PRG see scope for further strengthening of this relationship in the future.

### **Support Services**

The PRG visited the Library and reviewed the textbook provision for Anatomy. The PRG were of the opinion that the textbook provision is entirely inadequate, particularly for the Neuroscience B.Sc. Degree. The number of research periodicals should be increased preferably in electronic format.

The PRG consider that the mortuary facilities are excellent although there has been pressure due to the loss of the mortician.

### **Departmental Co-Ordinating Committee & Methodology Employed in the Preparation of the Self-Assessment Report**

The PRG had the impression that the Self-Assessment Report had initially been drafted mainly by the two most senior members of staff and that input from some other staff had been somewhat limited. However, it became evident during the visit that the staff of the Department generally supported the final Self-Assessment Report.

## **Recommendations for Improvement from Department**

The reviewers considered recommendations for improvement made by the department and endorsed the following:

1. **That regular staff meetings be held.**

The reviewers endorsed this recommendation noting that the staff meetings should include representatives of all staff, including technical, part-time and administrative staff.

2. **That more research income should be generated.**

3. **That the numbers of students in the BSc Neuroscience Degree programme should be increased.**

4. **That the arrangements for reporting within faculty structures be reviewed and re-considered.**

The reviewers were of the opinion that the present reporting arrangements are problematic for areas such as the Department of Anatomy that is expanding rapidly. There is no opportunity for the head of Department to properly represent the department and the discipline except via the curriculum committee of the School of Medicine.

### **The panel commends the department for ...**

- The care and enthusiasm shown by the staff in their teaching.
- The skill and dedication shown by the clerical, technical and other support staff.
- The development of excellent research facilities and the commensurate improvement in research output.
- The excellent training received by research students (although there is the need for the department to provide opportunities for post graduate students to improve their own teaching experience)

- The development of the Neuroscience undergraduate degree programme. The panel would support an increase in student numbers in this programme and would recommend that the department develops industrial placement training and a research techniques course (including philosophy of science, bioethics, and more molecular techniques). The panel further recognises that there needs to be an improvement in career advice to undergraduate students on the neuroscience programme.
- Developing Anatomy in a clinical relevant way for Medical and Dental students.

**The Panel would encourage the University to...**

- Improve departmental buildings and facilities within the Windle Building. In particular, and as a matter of priority, the panel recognises that the large Anatomy Lecture Theatre should be refurbished and extended since its capacity is exceeded by present student numbers in the medical class. The Vice-President for Planning, Communications and Development is well aware of this problem and is anxious to find a solution in cooperation with the Department.
- Improve the complement of academic staff within Anatomy. The panel recommends that an existing temporary, full-time academic post should be converted to a permanent full-time post and, in addition, a new permanent full-time academic post should be created.
- Increase secretarial/administrative staff within the Anatomy department to two.
- Consider directly devolving budgets to the departmental level. The system/formulae should be transparent and financial management should be under departmental control. Such changes would require that the University critically evaluates the role of Faculties and Deans.
- Consider provision of skills training for technical, as well as administrative, staff.

**The Panel recommends that the Department should....**

- Cut total hours of teaching by at least 15%. In particular, the department should review the balance between lectures, tutorial and practical sessions and should make greater use of computer and web-based teaching such as 'Blackboard.com'.
- With an increase in staffing numbers (see bullet point above), the teaching loads will be improved from in excess of 210 hours per member of staff to approximately 150 hours per member of staff on average.
- Re-distribute teaching loads, particularly for those whose loads are excessive and those with heavy research commitments.
- Cut assessment/examination loads for the benefit of both staff and students (although students should have more formative tests on 'Blackboard.com').
- Organise formal staff meetings. Such meetings should include academic and non-academic members of staff
- Establish a formal staff/student committee in line with University regulations and more effectively use student questionnaires.
- Ensure, as far as possible, that the end-of-year assessments/examinations and the re-sit examinations have similar formats. In addition, the markings systems used for objective assessments (such as MCQs) should be critically re-evaluated.
- Improve the clarity of course objectives/learning outcomes and the organization of the professional courses that are allied to medicine.
- Ensure that, where dissecting room teaching is undertaken, that the skills-base is as well developed as the information-base (e.g. for the understanding of ethical and death-related issues; the understanding of biological variation; the evidence of pathology seen in the cadaver)
- Improve liaison with the University Library and I.T. services in order to optimize the resources related to Anatomy and to encourage the development of Teaching and Learning Resources Centres in the University.

**Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit**

**Department of Anatomy**

***Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2004***

- 18.00 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 members of the department

***Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2004***

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group
- Consideration of Self-Assessment Report
- 09.00 Professor John Fraher, Head of Department
- 09.30 All staff of Department
- 10.30 Tea/coffee for PRG + all staff
- 11.00 Meetings of individual members of staff with the Peer Review Group
- 11.00 Dr. Aideen Sullivan  
11.10 Prof. John Fraher  
11.20 Dr. Peter Dockery  
11.30 Dr. Robin O'Sullivan  
11.40 Dr. Kieran McDermott  
11.50 Dr. Yvonne Nolan  
11.55 Dr. Audrey Bradley  
12.00 Dr. Kathleen Quane  
12.08 Ms. Tracy Cuffe  
12.16 Ms. Angela Marsh  
12.24 Dr. Don O'Leary  
12.32 Ms. Bereniece Riedewald  
12.40 Ms. Miriam Bogan  
12.50 Ms. Deirdre Kelleher
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Visit to core facilities of Department, including facilities at BioSciences Institute.

PRG escorted by Professor Fraher and Dr. O'Sullivan

- 15.30      Undergraduates in Medical/Dental programmes  
Dip Dent Hygiene 1: Niamh Ryan  
Dent 1: Killian Power  
Dent 2: Siobhán Lucey  
Med 1: David Sullivan  
            Zoë Williams  
Med 2: Maeve Kelleher  
            Robbie O'Sullivan
- 16.00      Undergraduates in Pharmacy/Nursing/Therapies programmes  
Pharm 1: Yvonne Blackburn  
Occ T: Elaine O'Connor  
S&L T: Niamh O'Brien
- 16.30      Undergraduates in Neuroscience programmes  
Sci 3: Eimear Minchen  
            Fiona O'Keeffe  
Sci 4: Rebecca Haworth  
            Eleanor Tuohy
- 17.00      Postgraduates  
Marcella Burke,  
Sinead Gibney,  
Sile Lane,  
Katie Spitere
- 17.30      Meeting with representative selections of recent graduates from Medical/Dental and BSc programmes, including junior doctors, Dental graduates, final medical students  
  
Chris Lynch, BDS  
Calvin Coffey, MB BCh BAO  
Gráinne Murphy, MB BCh BAO  
Ger O'Keeffe, BSc  
Mark Hannon, Final Medical  
Siobhán Nolan Postgrad (PhD)
- 19.00      Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day, followed by a working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group

***Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004***

- 08.30      Convening of Peer Review Group
- 09.00      Professor Aidan Moran, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
- 09.30      Professor Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

- 10.00 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office
- 10.30 Mr. Michael O'Sullivan, Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development
- 10.45 Tea/Coffee
- 11.00 Professor Eamonn Quigley, Head of School of Medicine
- 11.30 Visit to Q+2, Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Ms. Una Ní Chonghaile, Subject Librarian
- 12.30 Professor John Fraher, Head of Department
- 13.00 Working Lunch
- 14.00 Professor Paul Giller, Dean of Science
- 14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Department by Professor B. Moxham, and summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. This presentation was not for discussion at this time.
- 19.00 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

***Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004***

Externs depart