



**University College Dublin**

**Periodic Quality Review**

**UCD Quality Office**

**November 2013**

**Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 18 March 2014**

## Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction and Context	3
2. Methodology for Review	5
3. UCD Governance and Oversight of Quality Reviews	7
4. Planning Management and Organisation of Resources	11
5. Functions, Activities, Processes	13
6. User Perspective	18
7. Commendations and Recommendations	19

Appendix One: UCD Quality Office Response to the Review Group Report

Appendix Two: Site Visit Timetable

## **1. Introduction and Context of UCD Quality Office**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of UCD Quality Office, at University College Dublin (UCD), which was undertaken in November 2013. The UCD Quality Office response to this Report is attached at Appendix 1.

### **The Review Process**

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, and international good practice (e.g. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2007). Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.

- 1.3 The purpose of periodic review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this essentially developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:

- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning opportunities.
- To monitor research activity, including: management of research activity; assessing the research performance with regard to: research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
- To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
- To provide a framework within which the unit can continue to work in the future towards quality improvement.
- To identify shortfalls in resources and provide an externally validated case for change and/or increased resources.
- To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice.
- To identify challenges and address these.
- To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality review procedures also enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

## **The University**

1.4 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origin dates back to 1854. The University is situated on a large, modern campus, about 4km to the south of the centre of Dublin.

1.5 The University Strategic Plan (to 2014) states that the University's Mission is:

“to advance knowledge, to pursue truth and to foster learning, in an atmosphere of discovery, creativity, innovation and excellence, drawing out the best in each student, and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland in the wider world”.

The University is organised into 38 Schools in seven Colleges;

- UCD College of Arts and Celtic Studies
- UCD College of Human Sciences
- UCD College of Science
- UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
- UCD College of Health Sciences
- UCD College of Business and Law
- UCD College of Agriculture, Food Science and Veterinary Medicine

1.6 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary, Arts, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 24,000 students (15,400 undergraduates, 6,900 postgraduates and 1,900 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on University programmes, including over 5,580 international students from more than 120 countries. The University also has over 5,000 students studying for UCD awards on overseas campuses.

## **UCD Quality Office**

1.7 UCD Quality Office is a support unit within Academic Affairs, headed by the Registrar and Deputy President. The Unit reports directly to the UCD Registrar and Deputy President.

1.8 In broad terms the UCDQO:

- supports Academic Council Committee on Quality (ACCQ) in its oversight role for quality review within UCD and in fostering a quality culture;
- assists the University in fulfilling its statutory quality review requirements;
- facilitates periodic quality reviews of UCD units, including preparing units for review; supporting the Review Group site visit; and ensuring appropriate follow-up is actioned to address review group report recommendations;

- monitors and reviews collaborative and transnational taught provision;
- develops and keeps under review related guidance and procedures;
- leads University preparations for institutional review;
- monitors national and international developments in QA/QI in HE and advises appropriate University bodies (e.g. ACCQ, UMT) of potential implications for UCD;
- prepares annual reports on Quality Assurance activity for internal and external bodies, e.g. UCDGA, UMT, ACCQ and QQI;
- advises the President/Deputy President on Quality issues generally and on specific issues that may arise from Quality Review Reports.

1.9 Staff turnover is relatively low within the unit. All members of staff have over 10 years experience in university administration, both in Ireland and overseas. There are three female members of staff and one male, with an age profile within the 40-55 age category. Although there are workload pressure points throughout the year, generally the current staff allocation is sufficient to meet current operating requirements.

1.10 The UCDQO, at an operational level, supports the quality review process in the University by: supporting units undergoing review, including briefings, facilitation of self-assessment report and site visit preparation; supporting review groups throughout the process, including briefings; organising logistical arrangements for members of review groups, including travel and accommodation arrangements; reviewing review group reports; supporting units in the development of their follow-up reports; engaging with other University committees; along with core office activities, such as supporting ACCQ and maintaining office functions.

1.11 The UCDQO relocated from the periphery of the Belfield campus (Woodview House) to a central location (Tierney Building) in 2011. This move has helped raise the visibility of the UCDQO and increased the informal contact of UCDQO staff with other members of the University community. The physical facilities of the UCDQO comprise 3 offices and a general office area.

## **2. Methodology for Review**

2.1 Typically, the review model comprises of four major elements:

- Preparation of a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) by the unit under review
- A visit by a Review Group (RG) that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period

- Preparation of a Review Group Report that is made public
- Agreement of an Action Plan for Improvement (Quality Improvement Plan) based on the RG Report's recommendations; the University also monitors progress against the Improvement Plan

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: [www.ucd.ie/quality](http://www.ucd.ie/quality).

2.2 The composition of the Review Group for UCD Quality Office was as follows:

- Professor Tom Bolger, UCD School of Biology & Environmental Science (Review Chair)
- Professor Denise McAlister, Pro Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning), University of Ulster
- Dr Gro Hanne Aas, Assistant Deputy Director General, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

2.3 The Review Group visited UCD from 11-13 November 2013 and held meetings with: UCD Quality Office staff on an individual and group basis, representatives from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); representatives of UCD Management Team; representatives of UCD Governing Authority; Academic Council Committee on Quality (ACCQ) members; Collaborative/Transnational programme co-ordinators; UCD Academic Secretariat; students who have participated in quality reviews; UCD Review Group Reviewers; Heads of School/Chairs of SAR Co-ordinating Committees that have been reviewed; Heads of Support Units/Chairs of SAR Co-ordinating Committees that have been reviewed; representatives of linked providers. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 2.

2.4 In addition to the Self-assessment Report and its appendices, the Review Group considered documentation provided in hard copy and online by the Unit during the site visit, including: Quality Review Guidelines; Review Group Reports; Unit Quality Improvement Plans; ACCQ Terms of Reference; UCD Quality Assurance & Enhancement Policy; User feedback; UCD Strategic Plan; ACCQ sample minutes and papers; IUA/IUQB Framework for Quality in Irish Universities (2007).

The Self-assessment Report was prepared in line with the *UCD Guidelines for Internal Periodic Review (Support Units)*, and the Academic Council Committee on Quality approved scoping profile – that is, to review the operation of the UCD Quality Office with regard to:

- the effectiveness of its organisation of the quality review process within UCD (in the context of the current Irish University Framework for Quality);
- the effectiveness of the institutional approach to monitor and review taught collaborative arrangements;

- the effectiveness of the structures in place, with institutional oversight responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement e.g. Governing Authority, ACCQ, UMT.

The Academic Council Committee on Quality established an Oversight Group to oversee the quality review process of the UCD Quality Office, in particular:

- to monitor the probity of the preparations for the review and the associated review protocols
- to approve the nominees for the Review Group
- to input to the site visit timetable

The ACCQ Oversight Group Members were:

- Professor Joe Carthy– Chair of ACCQ & College Principal (UCD College of Science)
- Ms Carmel O’Sullivan – Associate Librarian, UCD Library
- Dr Joe Brady – Dean of Arts
- Mr Robert French – Chief Technical Officer
- Mr Shane Comer – SU Vice-President 2012-13 (Student Member)

As the staffing complement of the UCDQO is small, a Self-assessment Report (SAR) Coordinating Committee was not established, as would normally be the case. The UCD Director of Quality, in consultation with UCDQO staff, prepared the SAR. Each staff member submitted a SWOT analysis which informed the initial draft report, which was considered by all staff in September 2013, prior to the Report being finalised.

### **3: UCD Governance and Oversight of Quality Reviews**

- 3.1 University College Dublin (UCD), in statutory terms, is an autonomous public university, which operates within a legislative and regulatory framework established by the Universities Act, 1997 and supplemented by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012. These Acts outline the functions and objectives of the University, establish how the University is governed, provides for academic freedom and operational autonomy, and sets out requirements for strategic planning, quality assurance, financial management and reporting, and key aspects of human resources policy.
- 3.2 The 2012 Act also led to the establishment of the Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) whose role and functions incorporate the previous functions of FETAC, HETAC, and the NQAI in relation to the maintenance and development of the National Framework of

Qualifications, the validation and awarding of qualifications, and the monitoring and review of providers. QQI also has responsibility for the external quality review of the universities, a function performed previously by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IQUB) in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

- 3.3 The 1997 Act which was the first piece of legislation to set out specifically the responsibilities of universities for quality assurance and quality improvement, provided a framework for institutions to develop their quality processes and systems on an individual basis. The Universities Act 1997, explicitly required each university to review the quality of the work of academic and administrative units on a ten-year cycle and to publish the outcomes of such reviews. However, the Universities, through the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee (IUAQC) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IQUB), chose to develop and implement a framework comprising a set of common principles and operating guidelines for quality improvement and quality assurance. The 2012 Act, repealed Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997) which pertained to Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The 2012 Act makes no explicit requirement for institutions to undertake unit review; institutions have potentially more flexibility to develop quality assurance procedures which are not restricted exclusively to unit reviews. They have also increased statutory responsibility to oversee quality assurance arrangements of collaborative and transnational provision.
- 3.4 A new Quality Assurance Framework for Irish Universities is currently under development by QQI in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Pending the formulation of a new Quality Assurance Framework, UCD are continuing to operate in accordance with the current Framework for Quality in Irish Universities. UCD has in place a range of embedded quality assurance processes at institutional level and within the core university activities of learning and teaching and research.

#### *The Governing Authority*

- 3.5 The primary responsibilities of the Governing Authority (GA) are, *inter alia*, to control and manage the affairs of the University, including the determination of its strategy and policies, to oversee the implementation of such policies, to appoint the President and monitor the performance of senior management.
- 3.6 UCD's Governing Authority, continuing practice under the now defunct, 1997 Act, retain explicit responsibility for oversight for quality and in this capacity receive an annual report on quality and are responsible for signing off on all Quality Review Reports prior to their publication on the website. UCDGA reviews and discusses the content of Quality Review Reports, usually through commentary by the Chair or the UCD Registrar and Deputy President.

#### *The Academic Council*

- 3.7 The UCD Academic Council (AC) has responsibility for all aspects of academic governance. It is the principal policy-making and advisory body on all academic matters (research and teaching); it approves and reviews academic regulations and policies and monitors academic

standards. The Group is very large (approximately 350 members) and the University has explicitly chosen not to implement a 2005 Institutional Review Report recommendation and disenfranchise members of the academic community by reducing its size. In practice, however, its operational governance remit is effectively discharged through eleven sub-committees including the Academic Council Committee on Quality (ACCQ) whose remit is 'to develop and foster a culture of evaluation and reflection and commitment to the maintenance of standards and quality in all UCD's activities'.

- 3.8 Notwithstanding the decision to maintain the current level of AC membership, the academic governance structures appear overly complex and the AC's effectiveness as the supreme academic governance body might be enhanced by rationalisation of its sub-committee structure and their associated roles and responsibilities.

#### *The UCD Quality Office*

- 3.9 The UCD Quality Office (UCDQO), located within the Office of the Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs, is responsible for organising quality assurance reviews of academic and administrative support units within the University together with thematic reviews and reviews of collaborative and transnational provision. The Quality Office's activities are overseen by the Academic Council Committee on Quality (ACCQ). The UCDQO prepares an annual report on Quality Assurance activity similar to that provided to the GA, for Academic Council and ACCQ.

#### *The University Management Team*

- 3.10 The University Management Team (UMT) comprising the President, Vice-Presidents, College Principals, Director of Strategic Planning and the Heads of the three largest Schools, also receives all Quality Review Reports, in addition to an annual report, prepared by the UCDQO on Quality Assurance activity in the preceding year. Academic unit and support unit review group reports are considered by UMT's Academic and Executive Sub-Committees respectively. To foster better engagement with UMT, reports are presented by the relevant College Principal or Vice-President, as appropriate.
- 3.11 The SAR and meetings with representatives of University Management, SAR Co-ordinating Committees, and staff from QQI and the UCDQO confirmed that one of the ongoing challenges facing UCD and the sector is the uncertainty about the future shape of external quality assurance frameworks, pending the outcomes of the ongoing national review of the external institutional review process and the framework for internal university quality assurance. The SAR makes reference to the range of 'Green' consultation papers, eighteen in total, which have been published and it was clear from the Review Group's meeting with staff from QQI that senior colleagues from the UCDQO are fully engaged with, and have a significant input to, these ongoing deliberations and that the institution's insights and expertise in this area are highly valued and respected. However, it is also apparent from discussions with staff from the QQI, Senior Management and UCDQO that meeting the diverse requirements of the wide-range of individual Irish HE providers encompassed in the legislation will pose a significant challenge for the QQI. The SAR and discussions with Senior

Management and UCD Group Reviewers identify that UCD's preference is to adopt a risk and proportionality approach to external and internal quality review and that the Framework, when agreed and finalised, should be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to accommodate a range of review methods and institutional capacities to undertake them. The institution under the auspices of the UCDQO and the IUA should continue to lobby for such an approach.

- 3.12 Three policy papers were identified as of particular importance from a quality perspective:
- Green Paper on Monitoring and Dialogue: concerned with the approach QQI may adopt with respect to monitoring and dialogue with providers, including those that are providers for the purposes of accessing the International Education Mark (IEM);
  - Green Paper on Quality Assurance Guidelines: which explored issues and options relating to the issuing of Quality Assurance guidelines and the overarching model(s) for QA; and
  - Green Paper on Reviews: which explored the possibilities for drawing on the models and experience of institutional review (the Review of Reviewers).
- 3.13 These ongoing policy developments will no doubt have impact on, and influence the future design of, UCD's approach to quality and quality review in the future. Furthermore, given that it is very likely that the outcome of the meta review will afford institutions greater autonomy it may be that the institutions may wish to avail of this opportunity to undertake a more fundamental and substantial review of its academic governance and quality assurance arrangements for the oversight and management of quality, and if so, any recommendations arising from this Quality Review would best be viewed and revisited in this light.
- 3.14 In summary, the Review Group, based on a review of the documentation made available and representative discussions with ACCQ members, policy officers, Review Group Reviewers, Chairs of SAR Co-ordinating committees and the student body concur with the findings of the most recent Institutional Quality Review Report (June 2011), and are content to affirm that the Governance arrangements for the oversight of Quality Assurance and Enhancement as overseen and implemented by the UCDQO are fit for purpose and clearly meet the legislative requirements of the 2012 Act and (emergent) international good practice.

### **Commendations**

- 3.15 The SAR supporting documentation and meeting conducted affirm that the University's governance arrangements and processes are fully compliant with statutory and legislative requirements.
- 3.16 The arrangements and practices adopted and implemented by the UCDQO under the auspices of the ACCQ take account of national, relevant European and international best practice.

- 3.17 The professionalism, commitment and expertise of the UCDQO team and the high regard and esteem with which they are held externally.

### **Recommendations**

- 3.18 The institution under the auspices of the UCDQO should continue to lobby for a risk and proportionality approach to external and internal quality review in discussions with the QQI about the new Quality Assurance Framework and across other relevant QQI policy developments.
- 3.19 In accordance with recommendations made in previous reports the UCD Academic Council should seek to review its sub-committee structure with a view to its rationalisation and simplification.

### **4. Planning, Management, Organisation and Resources**

- 4.1 As a management unit, the UCDQO falls within the UCD Office of the Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs. The Governing Authority of University College Dublin, according to the Universities Act of 1997, had/should have explicit oversight for quality. UCDQO prepares an annual report on Quality Assurance to the Governing Authority, and GA also receives all Quality Review Reports for consideration and acceptance. The University Management Team or the Executive receive the same reports as GA. UCDQO also reports to the Academic Council through its sub-committee, the Academic Council Committee for Quality (ACCQ), who has oversight of quality assurance for the University. UCDQO supports ACCQ in its oversight role for quality review within the University, and in fostering a quality culture.
- 4.2 The Unit finds itself in circumstances of transitions: one of the Unit's main tasks that followed from Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997), facilitating periodic quality reviews of units, was repealed in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act of 2012. In the interviews, some asked openly, with reference to the changing circumstances of the universities and public sector, if the current Irish HE approach to periodic quality review of units still is fit for purpose. The future relationship between the universities and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is not yet clear. The change in the Unit's sources of funding also adds to a situation of transition.
- 4.3 The SAR provides information on the context, networks and the roles of the UCDQO. In addition to facilitating periodic reviews of the units, the UCDQO advises relevant bodies on issues arising from the review reports, plays an advisory role in professional accreditation visits, assists the University in fulfilling its statutory quality review requirements, supports ACCQ in oversight and fostering a quality culture, monitors and reviews collaborative and transnational taught provision, leads preparations for institutional review, monitors national and international developments in QA and advises the University, and prepares annual reports on QA activity.

- 4.4 One topic that was not discussed in the SAR, was the type of support given by the Unit to ACCQ. The impression from the interviews, however, is that the support should be more focused on quality strategy and quality culture than it is now.
- 4.5 The Unit is staffed by Director of Quality, Deputy Director of Quality, Quality Officer and Executive Assistant. The Director is male, the three others are female. The Quality Officer post is a three-year temporary acting-up post and the current Executive Assistant is employed on a three-year fixed term contract. According to the SAR, the current staff allocation is generally sufficient to meet operating requirements, but the situation may be challenged by increased portfolio of transnational provision and other possible changes in review requirements. Formal staff meetings are held approximately every 4-6 weeks, and there are regular discussions on the status of the reviews.
- 4.6 The SAR provides information on how UCDQO engages with several internal and external support services and providers. UCDQO enjoys a positive relationship with other support units that have roles in the reviews, such as Teaching & Learning, Library, Human Resources, Institutional Research, Academic Secretariat and Research.
- 4.7 The SAR provides information on how the members of the Quality Office staff take an active role in the Irish Higher Education Quality Community, both as members of committees and working groups and as participants in national and international forums.
- 4.8 The whole of the budget comes from university resources. Until 2010-2011, the Higher Education Authority allocated ring-fenced funding to the universities for institutional quality assurance reviews. The sum that was provided from HEA covered approximately 50% of the operating budget of UCDQO, and the equivalent must now be found in competition with other areas. There is a general pressure to reduce operating costs and in the SAR the UCDQO presented considerations for reduced costs.
- 4.9 UCDQO is currently (from 2011) located in 3 offices and a general office area in the Tierney Building, a central location on campus. According to the SAR, this location has raised the visibility of the UCDQO and increased contact with other members of the University community. However, some of the staff of the unit find the office space too restricted to cater for their tasks. There is also a need for better insulation along the external windows.

### **Commendations**

- 4.10 The Review Group commend the well-qualified and vital staff. Persons interacting with the Unit speak very highly of its staff. UCDQO is in a transition period, regarding both the changes in funding and the changes of QA-structures on the national level. However, initiatives are taken to further new patterns of interaction, e.g. between the units that deal with transnational provision and recognised colleges. The unknown future provides a horizon for open learning from the present situation.
- 4.11 The work and competence of the Unit contributes to the predictability of the process for the units undergoing periodic quality review.

- 4.12 UCDQO contributes actively to the quality discourse at UCD and in the Irish Higher Education Quality Community.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.13 UCDQO and other relevant bodies should consider carefully whether the considerable skills set of the staff are being leveraged to optimum effect.
- 4.14 Members of the Quality Office staff take an active role in committees and network within the University and in the Irish Higher Education Quality Community. The Review Group wants to stress that this networking activity should be shared between the members of staff, to secure stability and development in the unit.
- 4.15 The University should reconsider the location of the unit and discuss if it would be resource effective to co-locate the unit with other relevant support units, such as Teaching and Learning or Academic Secretariat.
- 4.16 It may be difficult to obtain further resources in light of the current funding constraints; however, the Review Group believe that maintaining the current complement of four staff would significantly improve its effectiveness and its ability to expand its role to broader ranges of quality assessment.

### **5. Functions, Activities, Processes**

- 5.1 The focus of UCD's activities is on continuous internal reflection and improvement whilst being fully compliant with externally generated regulatory and accreditation requirements.
- 5.2 The UCD Quality Office was established in 1995, and its current main functions and responsibilities include:
- assisting the ACCQ in its role of developing, fostering and embedding a quality culture;
  - assisting the University in fulfilling the requirements of the 2012 Act and in meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
  - advising and assisting the ACCQ in discharging its responsibilities keeping under review and developing university quality review policy and procedures in line with legislative requirements and international best practice;
  - having direct responsibility for managing periodic unity quality reviews, thematic review and transnational and collaborative review processes;
  - ongoing development of the guidelines and supporting material for unit's undergoing review (e.g. templates, data support from the Office of Institutional Research);

- assisting and advising academic and service units in carrying out self-assessment procedures and peer review including briefing units, initial planning, establishing Review Groups and providing guidance on the development of QIP and progress plans;
- preparation of annual reports for management, the Governing Authority and external bodies.

### *Periodic Quality Review*

- 5.3 Launched in 1995, the UCDQO currently conducts ‘unit’ reviews on a 7-8 year cycle where the term ‘unit’ is used to describe an organisationally defined academic, administrative or support service entity. These reviews examine holistically various aspects of the unit’s operations; its primary focus is on quality improvement underpinned by self-assessment by the unit under review. Peer review and stakeholder participation are also integral parts of the process which is overseen by ACCQ.
- 5.4 Periodic Quality Review comprises a four-phase process: (i) preparation of a self-assessment report, (ii) peer review and site visit, that includes one or two UCD staff and at least two experts, both national and international, producing a Review Group Report which is published, and (iii) Quality Improvement Planning (QIP) based on the Review Group’s recommendations, and (iv) a progress review meeting approximately one year later. The Review Group typically will have the opportunity to meet with relevant stakeholders, internal and external and particularly in reviews of academic units and units providing services directly to students, e.g. Careers, with current students and alumni. The role of the UCDQO is to support units and Review Groups through the review process and to provide a co-ordinating and advisory role. The SAR and discussion with units which had undergone review suggest that the process is viewed positively in the main and worthwhile despite adding to workloads. However, several issues were identified.
- 5.5 The quality review process explicitly recognises the importance of, and encourages participation, by students and appropriate guidance has been developed by the UCDQO. Nevertheless, meetings with student representatives suggest that engagement could be enhanced further. Students, from units which had recently been reviewed, spoke positively about their participation in the review process but struggled to see its benefits apart from its usefulness in getting issues on the agenda. The students confirmed that they did not receive copies of the SAR, nor the QIP following receipt of the Review Group’s report. The Review Group were of the view that student engagement could be enhanced through more effective communications including ensuring, as part of the unit review protocol that the SAR and QIP were shared with student representatives.
- 5.6 The identification, selection and recruitment of credible external peers whose views will be respected by staff and who will add value to the process was recognised by the UCDQO and by several groups interviewed and in the written documentation provided. There was some reference to the inconsistency in the level of engagement and capabilities of external

reviewers on a few occasions, leading to levels of variability in the dynamic of the Review Group and engagement with the unit under review.

- 5.7 Pilot schemes, modifications to procedures, further guidance including face-to-face briefings had been introduced to address the issue which is kept under review by the UCDQO and the ACCQ.
- 5.8 Similarly, the issue of the relative merits of an internal versus an external independent Chair of the Review Group has been the subject of much discussion. Feedback from meetings with internal review groups' members supports the retention of an internal Chair as it was felt that this led to greater consistency of approach, direct access to more contextualised background information and better oversight of the processes, particularly post-Review Group site visit, with regard to review and implementation of the QIP. Again, the issue will be kept under review by the UCDQO and ACCQ.
- 5.9 Units prepare a QIP within 12 weeks of receiving the Review Group Report. The QIP outlines what action has or will be taken to address the Review Group recommendations. The SAR, supporting documentation and meetings with staff questioned the extent to which the QIP and its associated Progress Review meetings effectively addressed the recommendations arising from the review some of which are within the delegated authority and resourcing of the unit under review, and those that are more strategic in nature. A related issue arising from the mismatch between strategic and operational agendas, is how to manage staff expectations derived from the output from the Quality Review. In discussion some staff felt that there may be merit in introducing a graduated system for recommendations: essential, advisable, desirable and also clearly distinguishing as appropriate those for action by the unit and those for others including senior management and/or the GA.
- 5.10 Concerns were raised by some Review Group Chairs that the tone of some of the Reports and their recommendations were very anodyne, sometimes to the point of uselessness, because of their subsequent requirement to be made publically available and accessible.
- 5.11 Institutional data for review is provided by the Institutional Research Office (located in the President's Office). Interviews with key users and providers demonstrated that there is a growing appetite for institutional data to inform review self-assessment and that the process could be made more consistent and uniform if a core set of performance data were agreed and provided to units undergoing review in a standard template for their review and analysis.

#### *Thematic Review*

- 5.12 UCDQO has also developed procedures to enable the review of more complex cross-institutional issues (e.g. research, assessment procedures etc). Whilst only one pilot review (Academic Support Services) has been undertaken to date, and one is underway (Research Institutes), a number of problematic issues have been identified, including resourcing, co-ordination, and follow-up. Notwithstanding the issues, some form of thematic review is

necessary to address cross-institutional issues as recommended in the EUA Institutional Review Report (2005).

#### *External Accreditation*

- 5.13 UCD has a large number of externally accredited programmes and whilst the SAR identified that the UCDQO would support a better alignment between external accreditation and internal quality review, for various reasons this has proved problematical. However, the UCDQO are committed to exploring options in the future for synergies between professional accreditation processes and Quality Review.

#### *Transnational and Collaborative Review Processes*

- 5.14 UCD has a growing number of collaborative and transnational taught programme links, including overseas franchise provision (China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka) and three recognised colleges, Institute of Public Administration (IPA), Institute of Bankers (IOB), the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). The number of UCD students taught overseas, currently over 5,000, is planned to expand to around 10,000 over a 3-5 year period. The UCDQO organises periodic quality review of this provision which places considerable demands on the unit, particularly at a time of reducing budgets. Draft guidance materials have been developed but the SAR identifies that there are considerable challenges to ensure co-ordinated, coherent and consistent monitoring, review and reporting on an increasing institutional portfolio of recognised colleges, linked providers, transnational branch campuses and franchised provision both in Ireland and overseas.
- 5.15 The SAR and meetings with the UCDQO and representatives from QQI, acknowledge that a coherent National Framework for the approval, monitoring and review of taught collaborative and transnational provision needs to be developed. Workshops, following the publication of IHEQN Guidance, are planned. This area remains a work-in-progress and a co-ordinated institutional approach will need to be developed and implemented to ensure that the necessary governance and associated decision-making structures are not disjointed. It will be a challenge for the UCDQO to monitor and review this expanding portfolio of collaborative and transnational taught provision.
- 5.16 From the meetings held with members of the Review Group it was evident that the UCDQO staff enjoyed good relationships with colleagues in both academic and administrative support units and were deemed to be dedicated, experienced, knowledgeable and highly professional. Meetings with external representatives confirmed that they have well-developed external networks and links and their professional inputs and advice is sought after and respected. This was especially so in the case of the UCD Director of Quality who, for example, chaired an IHEQN Working Group established to develop a set of national Guidelines for Collaborative and Transnational Provision.
- 5.17 Reviewed units also spoke highly of the personal support provided to them in preparation for review and the quality of the guidance and documentation provided. There was general agreement in the feedback from previous review participants and chairs that its benefits

were highly correlated with the effort put in by, and the importance attributed to the exercise, by members of the academic and support units undergoing review.

- 5.18 On the basis of the written evidence made available to the Review Group and discussions with staff and students, it may be concluded that there is an embedded quality culture at UCD. This was evidenced by exploration of the formal processes, protocols and systems in place which are designed to ensure and enhance quality, but also from verbal testimonies provided by those interviewed, as to how they are embedded into the operational day-to-day workings of the University.

### **Commendations**

- 5.19 A strong quality and professional ethos and commitment by the team to both embed and enhance quality processes across the University.
- 5.20 Strong distributed leadership within the UCDQO with the potential to extend its role, as currently defined, and assume a more prominent, strategic role.
- 5.21 Clear evidence that the approaches adopted are more than compliant with the legislative requirements and current and emergent good practice, nationally and internationally.
- 5.22 Excellent feedback received from internal stakeholders (including link providers) on the support provided by staff from the UCDQO and the high quality guidance documents, templates, worked examples, and support materials produced.
- 5.23 High visibility of the Director of Quality externally, and the positive status and esteem within which he, and by association the University, are held externally within the section QA/QI communities of practice.

### **Recommendations**

- 5.24 Given the distributed nature of QA/QI there is scope for the ACCQ to better discharge its functions in accordance with its current Terms of Reference. It should be more pro-active in identifying suitable projects to facilitate and encourage this and should provide more opportunities for staff in the UCDQO to undertake a more strategic role, in collaboration with other units, in relation to quality assurance, quality management and quality enhancement, to avoid insularity and to give greater prominence and visibility to the role of the Office.
- 5.25 There is merit and scope for the UCDQO to undertake more ‘thematic’ reviews to address interdisciplinary and University-wide issues.
- 5.26 Further consideration should be given as to how Review Group reports and their associated QIPs are progressed by their respective units and better aligned to the units’ strategic planning processes and timescales.

- 5.27 The Review Group recommends a slight modification to the Unit Review guidance to ensure that not only are student views sought as an integral part of the review process, but also that the feedback loop is closed by ensuring that planned actions arising from reviews that are relevant to the student body are subsequently shared with the students.
- 5.28 Members of review groups would support the development of standardised templates populated with key institutional data sets to inform unit review and provide a more consistent and uniform basis for analysis.
- 5.29 The Review Group recommends that consideration is given to the current constraints on the openness and directness of the language used in reporting and current legislative requirements to publish review group reports on the publically accessible institutional website.
- 5.30 Other feedback suggests that some Heads of Unit would welcome (notwithstanding the recommendation above), more direct, graduated and prioritised sets of recommendations for implementation.
- 5.31 Given the Director of Quality's highly effective engagement on behalf of the institution, further consideration should be given, and opportunities provided, to other members of the team to lead on internal initiatives as part of their ongoing career development and to facilitate institutional succession planning.
- 5.32 As previously indicated, a national review of the Quality Assurance Framework is underway, and when agreed there is scope for a fundamental review of the current governance arrangements for quality assurance and quality improvement, its purpose and benefits to the institution, and the role of the UCDQO in their effective implementation.

## **6. User Perspective**

- 6.1 The UCDQO routinely gathers feedback from users both formally and informally. Surveys are circulated to the chairs and/or co-ordinators of SAR co-ordinating committees on an annual basis, and also to members of review groups. Informal feedback from the users is shared amongst the staff in UCDQO. For the SAR, two focus groups gave feedback in September.
- 6.2 Both the materials from the surveys and focus groups, and the information from the interviewed user representatives, indicates a high satisfaction from the user perspective. From the surveys, the satisfaction score on communications with the UCDQO is between 80 and 90 percent. The impression is that the members of the UCDQO are highly professional. Users interviewed gave several examples of how the cooperation with the UCDQO stimulates enthusiasm for quality matters in the unit under review.
- 6.3 Quite a few of the people interviewed by the Review Group expressed a willingness to contribute to a discussion of whether the current model for review is fit-for-purpose and

whether the review of units is the optimal use of resources. The same can be observed in the summary from the feedback mechanisms in the documentation.

- 6.4 One area for further reflection, stressed in the SAR, is to take steps to ensure that the student body becomes more aware of the quality review process and how they can contribute to it. The topic of students as users in the review processes, and partners for quality, are not always clearly visible in the Self Assessment Reports sampled. It became clear through the interviews that students felt they have scarce information on the processes of unit reviews.

### **Commendations**

- 6.5 On the backdrop of results from the feedback materials and user interviews, UCDQO should be commended on well-managed processes and excellent service to the users.
- 6.6 The UCDQO routinely gathers formal and informal feedback to improve the procedures and processes. In the SAR, the feedback on a broad range of topics is presented in an open manner.
- 6.7 In the SAR, one finds an explicit awareness of the balance between the units and the UCDQO when it comes to important topics such as expectations and ownership of the processes.

### **Recommendations**

- 6.8 The Review Group wants to emphasise that the users of the periodic unit review processes must be considered as an asset in the discussions on developing fit for purpose models and development of new frameworks. As hinted in the SAR, the UCDQO should involve users in discussions and the processes of developing a refreshed internal quality framework.
- 6.9 The UCDQO should prioritise the development of a more interactive and fruitful relationship with the students as users, and to the Students' Union. It might also be necessary to refine the understanding of students as users.

## **7. Commendations and Recommendations**

### ***7.1 UCD Governance and Oversight of Quality Reviews***

#### **Commendations**

- 7.1.1 The SAR supporting documentation and meeting conducted affirm that the University's governance arrangements and processes are fully compliant with statutory and legislative requirements.

- 7.1.2 The arrangements and practices adopted and implemented by the UCDQO under the auspices of the ACCQ take account of national, and relevant European and international best practice.
- 7.1.3 The professionalism, commitment and expertise of the UCDQO team and the high regard and esteem with which they are held externally.

### **Recommendations**

- 7.1.4 The institution under the auspices of the UCDQO should continue to lobby for a risk and proportionality approach to external and internal quality review in discussions with the QQI about the new Quality Assurance Framework and across other relevant QQI policy developments.
- 7.1.5 In accordance with recommendations made in previous reports the UCDAC should seek to review its sub-committee structure with a view to its rationalisation and simplification.

### ***7.2 Planning, Management, Organisation and Resources***

#### **Commendations**

- 7.2.1 The Review group commend the well-qualified and vital staff. Persons interacting with the unit speak very highly of its staff. UCDQO is in a transition period, regarding both the changes in funding and the changes of QA-structures on the national level. However, initiatives are taken to further new patterns of interaction, e.g. between the units that deal with transnational provision and recognised colleges. The unknown future provides a horizon for open learning from the present situation.
- 7.2.2 The work and competence of the unit contributes to the predictability of the process for the units undergoing periodic quality review.
- 7.2.3 UCDQO contributes actively to the quality discourse at UCD and in the Irish Higher Education Quality Community.

#### **Recommendations**

- 7.2.4 UCDQO and other relevant bodies should consider carefully whether the considerable skills set of the staff are being leveraged to optimum effect.
- 7.2.5 Members of the quality office staff take an active role in committees and network within the University and in the Irish Higher Education Quality Community. The Review Group wants to stress that this networking activity should be shared between the members of staff, to secure stability and development in the unit.

- 7.2.6 The university should reconsider the location of the unit and discuss if it would be resource effective to co-locate the unit with other relevant support units, such as Teaching and Learning or Academic Secretariat.
- 7.2.7 It may be difficult to obtain further resources in light of the current funding constraints; however, the Review Group believe that maintaining the current complement of four staff would significantly improve its effectiveness and its ability to expand its role to broader ranges of quality assessment.

### **7.3 Functions, Activities, Processes**

#### **Commendations**

- 7.3.1 A strong quality and professional ethos and commitment by the team to both embed and enhance quality processes across the University.
- 7.3.2 Strong distributed leadership within the UCDQO with the potential to extend its role, as currently defined, and assume a more prominent, strategic role.
- 7.3.3 Clear evidence that the approaches adopted are more than compliant with the legislative requirements and current and emergent good practice, nationally and internationally.
- 7.3.4 Excellent feedback received from internal stakeholders (including link providers) on the support provided by staff from the UCDQO and the high quality guidance documents, templates, worked examples, and support materials produced.
- 7.3.5 High visibility of the Head of Quality Office externally, and the positive status and esteem within which he, and by association the University, are held externally within the section QA/QI communities of practice.

#### **Recommendations**

- 7.3.6 Given the distributed nature of QA/QI there is scope for the ACCQ to better discharge its functions in accordance with its current Terms of Reference. It should be more pro-active in identifying suitable projects to facilitate and encourage this and should provide more opportunities for staff in the UCDQO to undertake a more strategic role, in collaboration with other units, in relation to quality assurance, quality management and quality enhancement, to avoid insularity and to give greater prominence and visibility to the role of the Office.
- 7.3.7 There is merit and scope for the UCDQO to undertake more ‘thematic’ reviews to address interdisciplinary and university-wide issues.
- 7.3.8 Further consideration should be given as to how Review Group reports and their associated QIPs are progressed by their respective groups and better aligned to units’ strategic planning processes and timescales.

- 7.3.9 The Review Group recommends a slight modification to the Unit Review guidance to ensure that not only are student views sought as an integral part of the review process, but also that the feedback loop is closed by ensuring that planned actions arising from reviews that are relevant to the student body are subsequently shared with the students.
- 7.3.10 Members of review groups would support the development of standardised templates populated with key institutional data sets to inform Unit review and provide a more consistent and uniform basis for analysis.
- 7.3.11 The Review Group recommends that consideration is given to the current constraints on the openness and directness of the language used in reporting and current legislative requirements to publish review reports on the publically accessible institutional website.
- 7.3.12 Other feedback suggests that some Heads of Unit would welcome (notwithstanding the recommendation above), more direct, graduated and prioritised sets of recommendations for implementation.
- 7.3.13 Given the Director of Quality's highly effective engagement on behalf of the institution, further consideration should be given, and opportunities provided, to other members of the team to lead on internal initiatives as part of their ongoing career development and to facilitate institutional succession planning.
- 7.3.14 As previously indicated, a national review of the Quality Assurance Framework is underway, and when agreed there is scope for a fundamental review of the current governance arrangements for quality assurance and quality improvement, its purpose and benefits to the institution, and the role of the UCDQO in their effective implementation.

#### ***7.4 User Perspective***

##### **Commendations**

- 7.4.1 On the backdrop of results from the feedback materials and user interviews, UCDQO should be commended on well-managed processes and excellent service to the users.
- 7.4.2 The UCDQO routinely gathers formal and informal feedback to improve the procedures and processes. In the SAR, the feedback on a broad range of topics is presented in an open manner.
- 7.4.3 In the SAR, one finds an explicit awareness of the balance between the units and the UCDQO when it comes to important topics such as expectations and ownership of the processes.

##### **Recommendations**

- 7.4.4 The Review Group wants to emphasise that the users of the periodic unit review processes must be considered as an asset in the discussions on developing fit for purpose models and

development of new frameworks. As hinted in the SAR, the UCDQO should involve users in discussions and the processes of developing a refreshed internal quality framework.

- 7.4.5 The UCDQO should prioritise the development of a more interactive and fruitful relationship with the students as users, and to the Students' Union. It might also be necessary to refine the understanding of students as users.

## APPENDIX 1

### UCD Quality Office Response to the Review Group Report

The UCD Quality Office welcomes the Quality Review Group Report at a time of significant transition in both the internal and external HE quality assurance environment. We welcome in particular the endorsement given by the Review Group to many aspects of our activities and the range of commendations contained in the Report. The UCD Quality Office also welcomes the recommendations for improvement set out in the Review Group Report. These recommendations will inform future discussions around the redevelopment of the UCD Framework for Quality Review, as part of the process to implement the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012.

The UCD Quality Office over the next 12 weeks will consider how to address each of the recommendations in developing its Quality Improvement Plan. The UCD Quality Office Self-assessment Report, the Review Group Report and the Quality Improvement Plan will all be used to inform the unit's work plan, which will also be aligned to the University's strategic plan and requirements of the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act.

The UCD Quality Office also acknowledges the commitment of staff and students across the University, to the development of a quality culture within the institution. We would also use this opportunity to recognise and thank those staff and students who contribute so much to the Quality Review processes within UCD.

## APPENDIX 2



### Review Visit Timetable

#### UCD Quality Office

11 – 13 November 2013

#### Day 1: Monday, 11 November 2013 - Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit

- 17.15-18.30 RG meet at hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days – **UCD Quality Office outlines process and leave**
- 18.30-19.00 RG meet with UCD Registrar and Deputy President
- 19.15 Dinner hosted for the RG by the UCD Registrar and Deputy President

#### Day 2: Tuesday, 12 November 2013

Venue: Boardroom 1 – Ardmore House

- 09.00-09.30 Private meeting of Review Group (RG)
- 09.30 – 10.15 **RG meet with staff from Quality and Qualifications Ireland** (Irish Qualifications and Quality Assurance Agency)
- 10.15-10.30 Break
- 10.30 –11.15 RG meet with **UCD Director of Quality**
- 11.15 – 11.30 Tea/coffee break
- 11.30 – 12.30 RG meet with **UCD Registrar/Deputy President and representatives of University Management Team and UCD Governing Authority**
- 12.30-12.45 Break – RG review key observations
- 12.45-13.30 **Lunch (buffet)**
- 13.30-14.30 RG meet with **UCD Quality Office Staff**
- 14.30-14.45 RG tea/coffee break

14.45-15.30	RG meet with <b>representative group of ACCQ members</b>
15.30-16.00	Break
16.00-17.00	RG meet with <b>Programme Co-ordinators – Collaborative Programmes/Director of Academic Secretariat/Senior Policy Officer</b>
17.00-17.15	RG review key observations
17.15	RG Visit UCD Quality Office, Tierney Building
17.30	RG depart

**Day 3: Wednesday, 13 November 2013**

**Venue: Boardroom 1 – Ardmore House**

08.45-09.15	Private meeting of the RG
9.15-10.00	RG meet with <b>representative group of students who have participated in the Quality Review Process (unit reviews) and University Committees</b>
10.00-10.15	Break
10.15-11.00	RG meet with <b>group of UCD Review Group Reviewers</b>
11.00-11.15	RG tea/coffee break
11.15-12.00	RG meet <b>representative group of Heads of School/Chairs of SAR Co-ordinating Committees that have been reviewed</b>
12.00-12.30	Break tea/coffee- RG review key observations
12.30-13.15	RG meet with <b>representative group of Heads of Support Units/Chairs of SAR Co-ordinating Committees that have been reviewed</b>
13.15-13.30	Break – RG review key observations and prepare for lunch meeting
13.30-14.15	Lunch – Review Group and <b>Representatives of Linked Providers</b>
14.15-14.30	Break
14.30-15.00	RG to meet with <b>individual members of Quality Office staff</b>
15.00-17.45	RG prepare draft RG Report
17.50	Brief <b>Exit presentation</b> to the unit – usually made by an extern member of the Review Group

(or other member of the Group, as agreed) summarising the key commendations/recommendations of the Review Group

18.00

Review Group depart