University College Dublin

Examples of Good Practice identified in University Quality Review Reports 2012-13: Issue 4

This report presents examples of good practice identified in University Quality Review Reports during the review period 2012-13*. The examples are organised under a number of broad themes, which parallel the structure of the Self-assessment Reports and the Review Group Reports. Some of the examples highlighted will, however, be subject/location specific, and so this schedule is not intended as an exhaustive, nor a 'standard practice' guide. The schedule will be updated annually.

Review Group Reports that have still to be considered by UCD Governing Authority (in October 2013) have been omitted from this Report.

UCD Quality Office
July 2013

1. **ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

- The University has undertaken to develop a more strategic approach to institutional planning and performance management. This was evident in the recognition of the importance of data collection, monitoring and analysis; the setting of institutional KPIs; the appointment of the new Director of Admissions and Enrolment with a mandate to manage enrolments in a way that ensures entry targets are met; and consideration of KPIs at executive level in the Colleges.

UCD School of Psychology

- The School is to be commended for its strong sense of identity and collegiality, with several academic staff linked to more than one research group. There is also good communication and *esprit de corps* among staff members.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- The Head of School has adopted an inclusive approach to the management of the School, with transparency around meeting agendas and minutes, budgets and the workload allocation model.

- Senior academic management roles in the School are sustained for three years before being rotated, thus making it easy for other units in the College to build and sustain relationships with the School.

- The Self-assessment Report was a well-informed, self-critical and forward-looking appraisal of the School's current performance and actions required to enhance both teaching and research.

UCD School of Music

- The Head of School, for whom there is clear regard and respect among staff and students, adopts a consultative approach and encourages collective decision-making and this is facilitated by regular School meetings that are open to all staff.

UCD School of Sociology

- The School responded positively to the previous QA/QI report in 2002, with regards to the changing organisational management and structure of the School.

2. **STAFF AND FACILITIES**

UCD School of Psychology

- Academic staff work productively and cohesively to achieve high-quality teaching and research. Excellent use is made of postgraduate students to support teaching.

- School facilities for teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate level are being used effectively and care has been taken to make the teaching and learning spaces attractive for students.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- The appointment of a research manager was strongly endorsed for both pre- and post-award support. The benefits could be evidenced by the substantial grant income generated by the School relative to other parts of the College.

- Postgraduate students are provided with discipline-related study spaces and a working environment that facilitates a sense of identify and intellectual exchange.

UCD School of Sociology

- Occasional lecturers and post-doctoral students highlighted the strong support they gained from administrative staff in becoming familiar with online systems.

3. **FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES**

UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

- There is a great range of useful and well-used support services offered through the ALL unit ranging from orientation to exam assistance.

- The use of peers in orientation, outreach, and Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programme is at the forefront of good practice and well regarded by students.

4. **TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT**

UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics

- The one-day preparation for *Gaeltacht* course is an example of good practice, which could be adopted more widely outside UCD.

- The School uses a rich and varied programme of assessment including group projects, portfolios and presentations.

- The explicit teaching of study skills in Celtic Civilization is an example of best practice that could be applied more widely.

UCD School of Psychology

- Students are very positive about their experience within the School and they feel highly supported by the staff.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- A huge amount of effort goes into student teaching, with an extremely strong ethos in support of education and a sense of common purpose that goes beyond module delivery.

- Staff have been adept at using appropriate technology to deliver their teaching. In particular, the Review Group were impressed with the creative use of Blackboard, Moodle and software instruction.

- There is a strong sense of identity within undergraduate programmes in planning and all postgraduate programmes, enhanced by common learning and social spaces.

UCD School of Music

- The breadth of teaching is impressive given the small staff cohort.

- Staff are steadfastly committed to teaching and learning activities across the curriculum, including activities (such as international trips) that are well beyond the normal call of duty.

UCD School of Sociology

- The teaching performance of the School impressed the members of the Review Group. In particular, the enthusiasm expressed by the group of students who met the Review Group during the visit indicated the success of the School's dedication to excellent teaching.

- The commendable role of the small group teaching was highlighted to the Review Group by both students and staff. It not only allows the undergraduate students to become more involved in their own learning but it is helpful for PhD students to get teaching experience and supports them economically.

- The Review Group commend the positive initiative shown by PhD students by organising a national seminar series.

5. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics

- The MA in *Nua-Ghaeilge* has been restructured to offer both literary and linguistic strands in response to market needs and the necessity of preparing students for further research.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- The School delivers a wide and expanding portfolio of courses at a time of budget constraints, with a diversity of teaching and assessment practices.

- There is a clear commitment to quality review and curriculum enhancement.

- There is a strong commitment to teaching students from across the College and University with a rich mixture of teaching based upon theory and practice.

UCD School of Music

- Widespread consultation is carried out in the context of (regular) curriculum reviews, feeding off (and feeding into) a strong sense of community in the School as a whole.

- Staff engage actively and energetically with teaching activities beyond the School.

6. RESEARCH ACTIVITY

UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics

- It was in the area of graduate student supervision that the Review Group made some of their most impressive and encouraging findings. The students the Review Group met with clearly felt well supported and that their work was valued and encouraged. They reported that they had very good and very regular access to their advisors and that they received the kind of mentoring that they needed. Seminars available in a number of subject areas were highly valued and the Humanities Institute is also regarded as an extremely valuable resource.

UCD School of Psychology

- School staff have been productive in obtaining external research funding to support their scholarly activity (€2.5 million over the past five years). This research income has been received through an increasingly competitive success, both nationally and internationally.

- The RG was impressed by the strength of the PhD programme, the activities of the School in creating a strong research community of doctoral students (including the setting up of the Distinguished Scholar Award) and, in particular, for having developed an explicit policy on publishing with graduate students, which is available on the School website.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- Many in the School are doing an exemplary job in securing research funding, with two thirds of the grant income in the College in recent years generated by this School. There is a culture of high productivity research, publication and external income generation that seems to be gaining in strength over recent years. This momentum should be recognised and capitalised on, with unequivocal recognition of the value of staff research.

- The School's successful bid to host a Lincoln Institute of Land Policy event in October 2012 and an International Conference on Urban Climate in August 2012, as well as its success at being selected as the hosting unit for the joint ASCP/AESOP World Planning Congress to be held in July 2013, are very significant accomplishments and will increase its stature as an internationally recognized research unit.

- The decision of the School to support a research manager position has paid obvious dividends in securing research income, and has relieved part of the burden on research-active academic staff.

- Research leaders within the School have been notably outward-facing, informing policy nationally and internationally, communicating research results through seminar series and continuing professional development events, organising conferences, participating in editorial boards, etc.

UCD School of Music

- Teaching is research-led. Undergraduates and masters students come into contact with staff's research at an early stage, and are systematically inculcated into the School's research culture.

- The *Musicology Review* systematically involves postgraduate students, giving them first-hand experience of editorial work, as well as providing many of them with an early opportunity to publish their own work. The quality of the published work is high, and the experience clearly invaluable for the postgraduate students.

- Team-teaching initiatives (for example a Modal Study course involving both a music analyst and an ethnomusicologist) lead some successful thinking about how the School's research culture might develop collectively, as well as individually.

UCD School of Sociology

- The research seminar series is to be commended. Most of the talks are publically available on YouTube and a range of excellent world-class speakers have delivered presentations. It is good to see the Schools engagement with other schools and institutes within the University and with Trinity College Dublin in organising and delivering these seminars.

- The School has an Annual Research Day, which enables staff to briefly discuss their research plans and strategies along with attending a public lecture given by a prominent sociologist.

- The School hosts bi-weekly roundtable discussions, which enable PhD students to discuss their research with their peers.

- The Review Group note the success of the Dynamics Lab research group which brings together academic staff, post-doctoral researchers and PhD students within an inter-disciplinary framework.

7. **MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND ENHANCEMENT**

UCD School of Psychology

- In addition to external examiner feedback, the D.PsychSc. operates a Course Advisory Committee (CAC) that reviews overall standards with reference to the report from the External Examiner and the overall organisation, management and funding of the programme. The Committee meets twice a year.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- Success in accreditation provides further evidence of quality and quality enhancement.

- In 2010-11 the School undertook an internal teaching and learning audit via the UCD module enhancement process. This exercise was completed in the first instance by the module co-ordinator and subsequently reviewed by the teaching and learning committee.

- The School is currently participating in an assessment re-design, involving staff teaching level 1 modules across the suite of undergraduate programmes.

UCD School of Music

- There is a good take up of the standard feedback mechanisms and this was reflected in student feedback, which, from the evidence provided, is very positive.

- The BA and BMus curriculum review (2010) and the MMus curriculum review (2011) were very welcome and thoroughgoing initiatives.

UCD School of Sociology

- The School has adopted effective mechanisms for the review of modules and has used the information obtained to enhance the quality of its teaching.

8. USER PERSPECTIVE

UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

- The Review Group commends the open learning programme which was highly prized by the participants, who were fulsome in their praise of the programme and the opportunities it provided.

9. SUPPORT SERVICES

UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics

- The School administrative staff are commended by the Review Group for their collegiality and excellent support provided to the staff and students, the subject areas, the website and the National Folklore Collection.

- There are good Library structures in place to support the School's activities and the School has a good relationship with the Liaison Librarian.

UCD School of Psychology

- The Library holdings are praised at staff, graduate and undergraduate level. The SAR Co-ordinating Committee engaged with Library staff to develop the bibliometric analysis. Such

interaction and analysis had a positive influence within the School in demonstrating the collective impact of School publications and also as a tool for individual ongoing self-assessment.

- The Administrative staff add to a general sense of 'belonging' expressed by undergraduate students. This perception is fostered by additional pastoral touches such as Level One start-of-year lunch introducing staff and students.

- Buildings and Services were involved in 2009 in the renovation of Labs. Evidence of an ongoing maintenance programme means the facilities appear in relatively good shape and present well. The study pods for graduate (M.Litt and PhD) students in the Postgraduate study room are impressive and welcoming.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

- The School reports strong support from the College structures: the College Principal, the Graduate School staff, the Finance Manager and the HR Partner.

UCD School of Music

- While resources are limited and services have been diminishing on many fronts, the School has managed to retain its high standards while maintaining good relations with support services.

- The School has a good relationship with, and receives good support from, many support units in the University, including, *inter alia,* the College Programme Office, College Finance Manager, UCD Teaching & Learning, UCD Finance/Bursar's Office, and UCD Registry.

UCD School of Sociology

- The School benefits from an excellent, dedicated administrative team. During the site visit administrative staff were praised by both academic colleagues and students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Indeed administrative staff show an incredible level of dedication to the School. They frequently work beyond the normal working hours and show enormous goodwill to the University. This is to be commended particularly in the current circumstances where pay cuts have been introduced at a national level for public sector employees.

- Development of training manuals for academic and administrative staff.

10. <u>EXTERNAL RELATIONS</u>

UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics

- The School is commended on its range of strong links with the wider community and external agencies in all subject areas particularly at national level in Modern Irish, Celtic Studies and Irish Folklore where a good relationship with the contemporary Irish scene was reported during the RG meeting with External Stakeholders. Activities include public lectures, membership of

editorial boards, state agencies, translation services in Dáil, Law courts, Brussels, consultancy and advisory boards.

• All subject areas within the School are commended on their academic collaborative links with other Irish institutions, and many international universities through external examination, visiting professorships, and international conference organisation, with Linguistics being particularly strong in international research collaboration. Notable recent international funding includes a member of staff on an Ireland-Canada University Foundation Visiting Professor and a current postgraduate being awarded a Fullbright Scholarship.

UCD School of Psychology

• The DPsychSc Clinical Psychology programme is an internationally recognised course and a good example of research-driven collaboration with the wider multidisciplinary health service community. It currently functions extremely well despite a highly volatile HSE environment.

• The School has high social impact as a result of its significant external engagement with policy-makers and key players in the area of national Mental Health and social policy, including the government's child protection agenda. The School also has a strong media profile.

• The School provides evidence of strong external links, both nationally and internationally, including significant programme links and exchanges developed at the level of D.Psych.Sc: links with Canada, UK, USA & Australia.

UCD School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy

• The School already has a strong infrastructure seeking to leverage its international linkages. It has an international programmes group and an international programmes co-ordinator

• The School has strong linkages to the profession, particularly in the planning subject area. This is enhanced by a well-established series of guest lectures from professional practice in the MRUP.

• The School has taken steps to enhance its communication with external stakeholders. Its website has been reconfigured to enhance its information content, presentation and organisation. In addition, the School has introduced an annual newsletter to widen external awareness of the academic staff and their activities.

UCD School of Music

• Performance ensembles on campus (the Symphony Orchestra, the choirs, and the Ad Astra scholars) provide UCD with a rich resource with which to forge relations across campus, and with the city and the country as a whole.

• The Ad Astra programme serves as a vehicle for forging strong links between UCD and the city; relations between the Ad Astra programme and the School of Music appear to be strong and productive.

- The School of Music's plans to host more international conferences, in conjunction with other international research activity, will ensure strong and ongoing visibility in the international research field.

UCD School of Sociology

- Members of academic staff have a good record of serving as external examiners, referees, assessors, editors of journals across wide range of universities.

- The School has good links with research institutes within College, Ireland and internationally.