



**National University of Ireland, Dublin  
University College Dublin**

**Programme Review of overseas degree programmes offered by  
the UCD School of Business in association with  
Asia Pacific Management Institute Kaplan in Hong Kong and Singapore**

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**Periodic Quality Review**

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**March 2008**

## 1. Introduction

This review of the current collaborative activities between the UCD School of Business and Asia Pacific Management Institute (APMI) forms part of the University's internal schedule of reviews as required under the 1997 Universities Act, and UCD's Governing Authority's Code of Conduct for the Operation of Overseas Programmes (March 2000). The review took place on 7 March 2008 in Hong Kong and on 10 March 2008 in Singapore.

**Review Group** Dr Mark Richardson, Head, UCD School of Architecture, Landscape and Civil Engineering (chair)  
Mr Roy Ferguson, UCD Director of Quality  
Ms Bronwyn Molony, UCD Deputy Director of Quality  
Extern: Professor Chung Lai Hong, Nanyang Technological University (attended Singapore review)

Dr Philip Nolan, UCD Registrar and Deputy President, and Dr Erik Lithander, UCD Director of International Affairs were also in attendance at a number of meetings held in Hong Kong and Singapore.

**Dates of Review** 7 March 2008, Hong Kong  
10 March 2008, Singapore

### Programmes under Review

Bachelor of Business Studies degree (BBS)\* – full-time and part-time, Hong Kong  
Master of Science degree (MSc) – part-time, Hong Kong  
Bachelor of Science degree (BSc)\* – full-time and part-time, Singapore  
Master of Science degree (MSc) – full-time and part-time, Singapore

\* The same programme structure is provided for the award of BBS or BSc. The degree award nomenclature reflects the qualifications preference in each market. The BSc is the undergraduate business degree used in Singapore and the BBS is used in Hong Kong.

## 2. Review Methodology

The Review Group received a Self-assessment Report and appendices prepared by the UCD School of Business and APMI.

The Review Group travelled to Hong Kong and Singapore to discuss the collaborative agreement, programme curriculum and its delivery, and met with the Dean of the UCD School of Business, UCD staff involved in the programme delivery and administration, and relevant staff from APMI supporting the programme administration, including: APMI Executive Directors, Marketing Managers, Academic Heads, Programme Managers and local Hong Kong and Singapore teaching staff. Further information and documentation was provided and/or requested during the site visit and these are listed in Appendix One.

The Review Group met with students, representing current undergraduate and postgraduate students and graduates in both Hong Kong and Singapore. They also had an opportunity to meet with one employer in Singapore, as well as reviewing testimonials from a number of graduate employers.

### **3. Background to the Collaboration**

Since 1991, the UCD School of Business has offered, in collaboration with Asia Pacific Management Institute Kaplan, a range of part-time and full-time business degree programmes. These programmes are the BSc and MSc in Singapore and the BBS and MSc in Hong Kong. The partnership is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement which contains:

- details of the programmes in operation and their specialisations,
- programme fee share arrangements,
- the student fee collection process,
- the obligations and functions split between the University and APMI,
- course commencement dates,
- minimum student intake,
- procedures for terminating the contract.

Amendments to the contract are by an addendum to the existing contract. The roles and responsibilities of UCD and APMI are clearly outlined on page 18 of the Self-assessment Report where: UCD has responsibility for academic and management aspects, and APMI has responsibility for programme administration, and facilities management.

The Centre for Distance Learning (CDL) was established in 2002, by the UCD School of Business, and has responsibility for the School's distance learning programmes and overseas programmes in Hong Kong, Singapore and Sri Lanka. It has six staff who provide management and support services for overseas and distance learning programmes. Two staff (Programme Manager and Programme Administrator) are dedicated to supporting the Hong Kong and Singapore programmes.

### **4. Programme Design and Delivery**

#### **4.1. Curriculum Pedagogy**

The Review Group were satisfied that there was an overall coherency to the curriculum pedagogy. The Review Group found that the programme objectives were clearly articulated in the programme documentation, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The undergraduate degree programmes are designed 'to meet the needs of students aiming to improve their understanding of the theory and practice of business management'. The curriculum is constructed around the central values of self-managed learning and reflection. The curriculum enables the students to attain the intended learning outcomes. The curriculum is progressive, from one level to the next with appropriate underpinning for subsequent study. Students are provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to progress to further study. Both the BSc in Singapore and the BBS in Hong Kong programmes consist of eight core modules with four pathway modules in Hong Kong (Management, Finance, Marketing and Logistics) and five pathway modules in Singapore (Management, Finance, Marketing, Logistics and Information Management). These programmes may be completed in eighteen months subject to students presenting with UCD approved advanced standing qualifications (see para. 5.2 below). The MSc degree programmes offered in Singapore and Hong Kong consist of ten modules and may be completed in 12 months for full-time

students, and 15-16 months for part-time students. The MSc programmes are designed to deepen the students' understanding and application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in business management.

The Review Group noted the length and focused nature of all degree programmes offered by the UCD School of Business, and also examined other university course prospectus' offered by APMI Kaplan and course advertisements by other institutions within Singapore. The UCD programmes delivered at APMI are comparable to similar programmes offered by other overseas universities and APMI, in respect of, for example, admission criteria, length of programmes, and module choice. The comparator institutions included:

- University of Hull, UK
- Southern Illinois University, USA
- Monash University, Australia
- University of South Australia
- Murdoch University, Australia

The Review Group would recommend that the School of Business should establish a formal curriculum review process to ensure continuing programme coherency.

#### 4.2. Curriculum Delivery

Modules delivered on the part-time programme require 20 teaching hours, while those modules on the full-time programme require 42 teaching hours. Students completing the BSc/BBS programmes must acquire 180 ECTS (including 60 ECTS granted for Accredited Prior Learning). Students completing the MSc programmes must acquire 90 ECTS. Teaching is delivered at the APMI facilities. Each student will complete a core set of modules on the programme and select a specialist pathway module. All modules have appropriate specified learning outcomes and are designed to incorporate work-based learning, which are well integrated with academic studies. A combination of assessment strategies are used in assessing modules, for example, pre-seminar assignment, additional assignment, learning journal, examination.

The Review Group reviewed a sample of the courses and was satisfied that adequate standards were maintained in the course offerings. The content, materials, and assessment methods, are appropriate and consistent with similar courses offered in other institutions. The instructors for the courses had good and relevant credentials appropriate to the courses they were teaching.

Module descriptors, text books and study guides were provided in both locations for the Review Group to consider, and were appropriate for the programmes. The Centre for Distance Learning provides an oversight monitoring role at programme level, and the programme manager acts as a conduit between local co-ordinators and the University in communicating any policy changes or any amendments to module descriptors. APMI is required to submit an annual return of registered courses that are awarded by non-local providers, and to highlight any changes in provision.

The Review Group noted the provision of 50% teaching input from UCD lecturers on the part-time programmes and recommends that this policy is maintained, and is applied to the full-time programmes too.

The Review Group noted that there were no programme descriptors in both Hong Kong and Singapore, as required for all University programmes. Programme descriptors should be prepared for each degree programme as soon as possible.

## **5. Programme Management and Evaluation**

### **5.1. Programme Marketing and Promotion**

All programme marketing materials are produced by APMI and approved by the Centre for Distance Learning. These documents are useful and informative and are produced to a very high standard. The Review Group recommends that this arrangement is maintained. Marketing is focused on the local market through advertising, computer or word of mouth. The content of the programme brochures reflects current student needs and expectations, and is targeted at local applicants. Student intake levels are consistent and generally rising in quality.

### **5.2. Admission to Programmes**

Programme admission at undergraduate level in Hong Kong and Singapore is directly into stage 2, based on Advanced Standing Qualifications (ASQ). The Review Group reviewed the current ASQ list (Appendix 10 of the Self-assessment Report). The Review Group recommends that the current list of recognised ASQs be rationalised and that the UCD Admissions Office, in conjunction with the Programme Board, have an increased role in verifying and approving qualifications for advanced standing entry.

Programme admission at postgraduate level in Hong Kong/Singapore is based on standard (University Degree or equivalent or a recognised professional qualification equivalent to that of a University degree) or non-standard entry (significant managerial experience or combination of non-degree level qualification and managerial experience). The Review Group noted that the number of students admitted on the basis of non-standard entry is limited to 20% of the student intake and would support the continuance of this policy.

The Review Group was satisfied that the assessment of student suitability for study via non-standard entry, was rigorous and consistently applied. The Review Group would, however, recommend that the conditions for non-standard entry should be reviewed annually, and that grade profiles and student progress data should be monitored as part of the annual programme review, for each non-standard entry student.

The Group reviewed the enrolment numbers as outlined on Table 8 of the Self-assessment Report, which provided evidence of the strong demand for UCD programmes. The popularity of the programmes is based on the University's reputation and that of the UCD School of Business (three external accreditations – EQUIS, AACSB and AMBA), the positive student experience, and the professional approach and delivery by APMI. Student applications and intake numbers are generally increasing.

With reference to undergraduate and postgraduate admissions, the Review Group noted and supports the current policy of two intakes per year. There is a set minimum student intake requirement before a programme is offered in a given period. The current student numbers reflect the successful marketing strategy undertaken by the UCD School of Business and APMI.

Students in Hong Kong raised some concerns about the impact on their studies of the standard of language competence of some fellow students. This factor was particularly evident in group project work, which led to a less than full distribution of work load when completing project work; restricted class interaction and engagement with the lecturer. A review of some of the sample exam scripts also raised concerns about the English language standard of some of the students – reflected in limited vocabulary (students resorting at times to bullet point answers) and the brevity of answers. The Review Group recognise that students must have a high level of competency in written and spoken English to fully benefit from the objectives of the programme. The current practice of interviewing applicants who do not satisfy the University's TOEFL or IELTS requirements is not sufficiently robust. The Review Group would recommend that the UCD School of Business and APMI should implement a stated minimum level of English language competency on its entry requirements. This would be consistent with University Guidance and Policy.

### 5.3. Registration and Student Induction

Concern was expressed by both staff and students in Hong Kong regarding the delay in issuing students cards after course commencement. A problem was also expressed with the quality of the reproduced ID photograph on the student card. The students clearly valued possession of a Student Card, which reinforced to them a sense of identity and a tangible link with UCD. Delays in registration especially, disadvantage students on such intensive courses. The Review Group recommends that the UCD School of Business should liaise with UCD Registry to highlight and resolve these issues as soon as possible.

The Review Group noted the comprehensive Student Handbook and induction provided to students, prior to the commencement of their programme. The support provided by CDL and APMI, and the provision put in place of study groups, are to be commended.

Students were, however, interested in additional tutorials within the current programme framework, as a means of providing an opportunity for them to engage with their lecturers and tutors and to discuss particular topics. The students also requested that attendance at these additional tutorials should be voluntary, to maximise the educational value for those motivated to attend. The benefit of introducing additional tutorial support by the School and APMI should be considered in the light of encouraging class interaction with specific reference to student project work, and engagement with the student peer group and lecturers. Students also identified a need to include some briefing information on accessing the UCD website, in particular the Library, and access to past papers.

The Review Group discussed with the School of Business and APMI the need, as highlighted in the Self-assessment Report, to establish student

forums for all intakes. The Review Group would recommend establishing student forums as soon as possible.

#### 5.4. Programme Delivery

The intensive nature of the teaching programme places particular demands on the student academic support services, such as IT and the Library. These services, however, are not always accessible to students due to technical problems. In particular, students had difficulty accessing the Library service. The Review Group recommends that a tutorial on accessing these resources is provided as part of student orientation

Access by local tutors to Blackboard is currently not available. This issue was raised by both APMI and the School of Business in the self-assessment report and during the site visit. Tutors are technically not UCD employees, as they are employed by APMI (APMI, however, are reimbursed by the School of Business), and attempts to obtain access for them have previously failed due to an issue with site licensing. Currently information on modules is input by programme managers rather than those presenting the modules. This leads to a time lag which can delay student engagement with Blackboard. The Review Group recommends that UCD HR, Computing Services and the School of Business should discuss and resolve this issue.

#### 5.5. Student Assessment

The Review Group confirmed that the UCD policy and procedures concerning student assessment were appropriately applied to programmes in both Hong Kong and Singapore. The Review Group noted that the examination papers were set by the lecturer, reviewed and approved by UCD Subject Heads. The Centre for Distance Learning also monitors exam papers set by lecturing staff over the previous three years to ensure exam questions are not inappropriately recycled. APMI hold examination papers securely until the day of the exam. It was not evident that all subject area externs had sight of these exam papers. The Co-ordinating Committee for the Self-assessment Report also highlighted the need to appoint dedicated extern examiners for these programmes. The Review Group would endorse this action, and recommend the accelerated introduction of programme external examiners to validate the standards of exam papers and assessments, as well as acting in an advisory role to the programme team.

Concern was expressed by the School and APMI, on the issue of extenuating circumstances, in relation to deferral of exams arising from a conflict between exam dates and student work commitments. The Review Group suggests that the School discuss this issue with the Director of Assessment and/or the Academic Policy and Programme Development Unit.

#### 5.6. Graduation and Alumni

The Review Group acknowledges the opportunity offered to students to attend conferring ceremonies in Dublin. Attendance at the ceremonies is a useful means of building links with graduates. The proposed building of alumni relations by the UCD School of Business is to be commended and encouraged.

The Review Group had an opportunity to attend and participate in conferring ceremonies in Hong Kong and Singapore during their visit. The programme

team are to be commended for their professionalism and the development of a positive experience for graduates and their families. This strengthens the sense of identity among graduates and families which may promote future collaborations with the graduate and UCD.

## **6. Programme Quality Assurance**

The Review Group noted the quality measures applied by both the UCD School of Business and APMI, to assure the quality of its programmes. These included, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) covering all aspects of the programme management processes, as outlined in Appendix 13 of the Self-assessment Report; review meetings between CDL and APMI; the Study Guides; and Student Updates. In particular, the application of the APMI SOPs, which sets out clearly each operational activity of programme delivery, is to be commended.

The absence of dedicated externs for overseas programmes, as noted under 'Student Assessment' above, was of concern to the Review Group.

The Review Group noted the absence of a record of formal meetings held between UCD School of Business and APMI, and recommends the establishment and implementation of formal records, including agenda, minutes and required actions.

The Review Group would recommend, in accordance with the UCD Governing Authority Code of Conduct for Overseas Programmes, that a simple system of annual programme monitoring be established to review, for example, external examiner comments, progress statistics, issues arising from meetings between the various stakeholders etc. The Memorandum of Association should be time limited (e.g. 4-5 years) and should be renewed following each periodic Quality Review.

## **7. Programme Finances – Income and Expenditure**

The Review Group noted the financial information supplied in the Self-assessment Report and the UCD Memorandum of Agreement with APMI. The Review Group recommends that the UCD School of Business continues to closely monitor income/expenditure and its adherence to the University's policy on additional payments to staff in respect of additional duties. The Review Group confirmed that the University Bursar's Office and the College Director of Finance maintain an ongoing oversight of the financial arrangements.

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Review Group noted the strong commitment from the UCD School of Business and APMI staff to the programme delivery in both Hong Kong and Singapore. A very positive and excellent working relationship was clearly evident to the Review Group and this was particularly apparent in the Group's discussions with students, and the clarity in the role allocation between the two APMI and the Centre for Distance Learning.

8.1. The Review Group would in particular, commend both APMI, in Hong Kong and Singapore, and the Centre for Distance Learning on the following:



- The good working relationship and long history between the UCD School of Business and APMI and the clear commitment expressed by both parties to the relationship
- The professionalism of staff in the Centre for Distance Learning and APMI
- The flexibility of the degree programmes offered
- Use of SOPs to support programme management and student care
- The Induction Programme along with Guides and documentation prepared for students
- The implementation of a 50:50 ratio of UCD visiting lecturers and local lecturers on the part-time degree programmes
- The provision of quality facilities in both locations for students
- Commitment of staff and support provided to students e.g. use of 'Update' as a communication tool that is tailored to student intake
- Pro-active management of low drop out rate

8.2. The recommendations of the Review Group are applicable to both Hong Kong and Singapore. Where the Review Group felt the recommendation was applicable to a particular site this has been indicated separately.

1. The University, in conjunction with the School of Business and APMI, should refresh the Memorandum of Agreement, and time-limit it, for example, a five year duration.
2. A formal record of meetings between APMI and the UCD School of Business should be maintained. This should include agenda, minutes and actions to be taken, and by whom.
3. The UCD School of Business and APMI should consider the introduction of a stated minimum level of English language competency on its entry requirements. This would be in line with University Guidance and Policy.
4. The current Advanced Standing Qualifications should be revisited in accordance with UCD academic governance, in particular, the policy document on *Accreditation of Prior Learning: Certificated Learning*. The School and APMI should liaise with the UCD Admissions Office and/or Registry on revising and refreshing this list.
5. The issue of extenuating circumstances arising from a conflict between exam dates and student work commitments should be resolved by the School of Business and the Assessments and Logistics Unit. An explicit policy should be incorporated into the existing policy document.
6. The UCD School of Business should consider the accelerated introduction of an external examiner system to validate exam papers and scripts as well as acting in an advisory role to the Programme team.
7. With the development of the requirement by the Education and Manpower Bureau in Hong Kong to seek an annual report of offshore activities it would also be useful for UCD to receive a summary report on the year past.

8. UCD needs to refresh and revisit the Code of Conduct for the Operation of Overseas Programmes (Governing Authority, 2000).
9. The University and the UCD School of Business should maintain and develop links with alumni similar to that of graduates from Dublin.
10. Access to UCD facilities such as the Library for students in Hong Kong/Singapore should be similar to those in Dublin. Tutorials on accessing these facilities should be provided as part of student orientation.
11. The University i.e. UCD HR and UCD IT Services should address the issue(s) that inhibits the rolling out Blackboard access to local tutors.
12. The Review Group recommends that a Student Forum be established as soon as possible.
13. Programme descriptors should be put in place for each degree programme.
14. The UCD School of Business should keep the curriculum under regular review.
15. The UCD School of Business should establish an annual programme monitoring system across the two delivery locations.

#### Singapore

16. The informal meetings held between UCD lecturers and local staff should be made formal.
17. APMI and the School of Business should consider some degree of linkage between the Dublin and overseas programmes in terms of offering, as an option, a semester or study trip in either location.

#### Hong Kong

18. The School and APMI should consider the introduction of additional tutorial support. This should be considered in the light of encouraging class interaction with specific reference to their project work and engagement with their peer group members, as well as input from lecturers.
19. The University, in conjunction with the UCD School of Business, should address the problems of the quality of student ID cards, and the delay in issuing these cards

8.3. In conclusion, the Review Group recommends that the current collaborative arrangement should continue and that a new agreement be drafted (taking into account the comments above) for a period not exceeding five years.

The UCD School of Business response to the Review Group Report is appended at Appendix Two.

## **Appendix One**

### **Material considered by Review Group during site visit and post visit**

#### Hong Kong

- Part-time Programme management Department Standard Operating Procedures
- Code of Practice for non-local courses, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation, December 2007
- Study Skills Handbook
- CDL Tutor Brief
- Sample course textbooks
- Sample BBS and MSc exam scripts
- Sample student exam papers
- Module descriptors
- Sample assignment feedback to students
- Marketing material
- Sample student evaluations
- Induction Course pack
- Application material

#### Singapore

- Study Resources – Text books and Study Guides
- Lecturers Curriculum Vitae
- Sample BSc and MSc exam scripts
- Sample assignment papers
- Sample exam papers
- Student Support Tools
  - o Update documents
  - o Briefing overheads
  - o Welcome document
- Module descriptors
- Sample Marketing and Publicity material

### **Additional Material Requested**

#### Hong Kong

Additional sample BBS and MSc exam papers and scripts  
Pass/fail rates  
Record of meetings

#### Singapore

List of modules offered  
Pass/fail rates  
Study Guides to match sample exam papers  
Overhead on APMI standards  
Record of meetings

## **Appendix Two**

### **UCD School of Business response to the Review Group Report**

UCD School of Business would like to thank the Review Group for its comprehensive report on the School's Hong Kong and Singapore programmes. The School would also like to thank colleagues within the School of Business and also its valued programme partner, APMI Kaplan, for their contribution to the quality assurance self-assessment exercise. The School and APMI found the quality assurance process very valuable and encouraged those responsible for various aspects of the programme design, delivery and assessment to carefully reflect on current practices and procedures. The School sees the Review Group's comments as an acknowledgement of the ongoing commitment and effort of all academic and professional staff associated with these programmes in both the School and in our partner institution. Over the next few months, the School will be developing a detailed Continuous Improvement Plan which will address the suggested enhancements to the programmes made by the Review Group.