



University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

Centre for Distance Learning
UCD School of Business
BSc Sri Lanka

August 2011

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1. Introduction

The original review of the BSc Sri Lanka programme, offered in collaboration between UCD School of Business and the National Institute of Business Management in Sri Lanka took place on 3rd and 4th December 2010. To facilitate the implementation of a Quality Improvement Plan in respect of UCD School of Business and its BSc Sri Lanka programme, a committee was formed to oversee the implementation of the Review Group's recommendations. Members of the committee are drawn from both UCD School of Business and from NIBM, as follows:

The following is a list of the members of the Quality Improvement Committee responsible for the implementation of the recommendations of the review group.

- a) Dr. Michael MacDonnell, Director of UCD Quinn School of Business and Programme Co-ordinator, BSc Sri Lanka
- b) Prof. Aidan Kelly, Director of International Affairs, UCD School of Business
- c) Dr. Linda Dowling-Hetherington, Associate Director, Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business
- d) Mr. Antonio Garzon-Vico, Programme Manager, Overseas Programmes, Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business
- e) Ms. Kishani Wijesiriwardana, Director, Management Information Systems, NIBM
- f) Mr. DMA Kulasooriya, Director Productivity & Management Development, NIBM

A number of discussions have since taken place between staff of UCD School of Business and NIBM (both in person and via telephone). The purpose of these discussions was to review the recommendations and decide on how best each recommendation would be implemented and the timeline for implementation.

2. Recommendations for Improvements – Follow-Up Action Taken and/or Planned

CATEGORY 1: Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit

- **Category 1(a)**

Recommendations already implemented

1. *Recommendation:* The next MOU should be put in place for a period of not less than 5 years to allow NIBM's strategic development to take place against appropriate planning horizons.

Action taken: A new MOU was signed by both parties in January 2011 and the duration of this agreement is for a period of five years. A copy of the agreement has been forwarded to the UCD Quality Office.

2. *Recommendation:* An effective working relationship exists between CDL and the NIBM Programme Office. However, increased communications would further benefit and develop this relationship. Formal records of meetings between NIBM and UCD School of Business should be maintained. This should include agenda, minutes and actions to be taken, and by whom.

Action taken: Formal records of all meetings between both partners (including minutes) have been maintained over the past number of years and the School will continue to ensure that this practice continues.

3. *Recommendation:* There is an identifiable need to introduce master's degree level programme(s) to develop competencies and deep technical knowledge in specific areas for the students while enhancing the collaborative arrangement between UCD and NIBM to the benefit of both the undergraduate intake and the two institutions.

Action planned: A Master of Science programme was introduced in June 2011, with sixty-six students currently enrolled across two specialisms, Management and Information Technology. It is envisaged that one intake per year will take place on this programme. Discussions are currently at an advanced stage with the UCD School of Computer Science and Informatics with a view to introducing a BSc Computer Science degree in the coming year.

- **Category 1(b)**

Recommendations to be implemented within one year

1. *Recommendation:* Opportunities for increased collaboration have been identified by NIBM and UCD. There is a need to develop discussion at SMT level to realise the full potential of the collaboration.

Action planned: The President of UCD, Dr. Hugh Brady, the UCD Director of International Strategy, Dr. Erik Lithander, visited NIBM in July 2011. During their visit a day-long meeting took place, the purpose of which was to discuss the possible expansion of UCD's collaboration with NIBM. During this meeting, NIBM set out their plans for considerable expansion

and the development of a new campus on a 40-acre site. The President noted the university's commitment to furthering its partnership with NIBM and agreed to establish a taskforce to produce a proposal by the end of September 2011.

2. *Recommendation:* The significant strategic developments at NIBM over the coming years require regular formal contact by the Dean of the UCD Business School with NIBM.

Action planned: A process will be implemented which will facilitate an annual strategic review meeting between the Dean of UCD School of Business and the senior management at NIBM. It is anticipated that the Dean will visit NIBM annually to attend the graduation ceremony and this visit will also serve as an opportunity for such strategic review meetings to take place.

3. *Recommendation:* Circulation of external examiner's reports to NIBM key staff needs to become a standard operating procedure.

Action planned: A copy of the annual report from the external examiners will be forwarded to NIBM by the Associate Director of the Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business. In previous years, the relevant extracts from these reports was forwarded to NIBM and any follow-up action required by UCD, NIBM or the module co-ordinators was identified and discussed with the relevant parties.

4. *Recommendation:* Consideration should be given to a form of recognising the ongoing commitment of UCD and NIBM to its talented student intake by the availability of a student award, for example a scholarship at Stage Level for the best performing student. The selected stage should be chosen to maximise the advantage of such an award to the student.

Action planned: Two half-scholarships were introduced for the first intake on the Master of Science programme. These scholarships were awarded to the top two students who were conferred in July 2011. It is expected that these scholarships will be offered each year.

5. *Recommendation:* Enhance student experience by changing the mode of delivery by visiting UCD lecturers (where practicable) to extend the number of weeks over which a module is delivered through a system whereby a lecturer would deliver two 30 contact hours modules concurrently rather than consecutively.

Action planned: This new delivery arrangement will be introduced, starting from the intake commencing their studies in September 2011. This will allow for the delivery to be extended by a number of days for each class. However, a further extension beyond this timeframe would not be feasible for financial/budgetary reasons.

6. *Recommendation:* Further develop the degree of interaction with students in module delivery by increasing the proportion of time used for project-based learning, teamwork exercises and verbal presentations.

Action planned: The School will explore the introduction of a combination of group sizes with, for example, 20 hours of lectures and 10 hours of small group tutorials.

7. *Recommendation:* Study guides, which are not always available for all modules, are of such importance in the context of the programmes that their timely availability should be assured through on-line availability at a specific time prior to module delivery.

Action planned: Start of term dates are now agreed between UCD and NIBM well in advance of the start of a new cohort of students. The Centre for Distance Learning will be working to ensure that study guides and other module material are made available to students by the term start date. NIBM will also ensure that all study guides written by local module co-ordinators are forwarded to the Centre for Distance Learning well in advance of the start of term date to allow for their review and approval.

8. *Recommendation:* Assignment deadlines are not adequately co-ordinated leading to sub-optimal workload peaks and this should be avoided through better student workload planning by the Module Coordinators.

Action planned: In developing the timetable for each cohort of students, every effort will be made by the UCD Centre for Distance Learning and NIBM to avoid any clustering of coursework deadline dates and the workload of students will be carefully monitored.

9. *Recommendation:* Timely feedback on assignments needs to be enhanced to allow continuous assessment play its full role in the learning experience (in addition to its Assessment role) and this could be achieved via Blackboard and the possible introduction of MCQ tests in continuous assessment.

Action planned: The Centre for Distance Learning has implemented a new process which allows the Programme Administrator responsible for handling assessment and grades to monitor the return of assignment feedback from module co-ordinators. While MCQ tests may not be appropriate for many of the modules currently offered on the BSc degree programme, feedback will be provided by all module co-ordinators and the provision of such feedback will be stipulated in the employment contract issued to each module co-ordinator.

10. *Recommendation:* Module feedback. There is a need to tailor the feedback questionnaire to the module. It is recommended that this be achieved by adoption of the UCD online module feedback system via Blackboard.

Action planned: A module evaluation is currently administered using 'Survey Monkey' and the Centre for Distance Learning has found that this has tended to result in a very high response rate to the questionnaire. However, the School acknowledges that there is a need to tailor the feedback questionnaire from time to time and module co-ordinators will be given an opportunity to do so going forward.

11. *Recommendation:* There is a need for some greater flexibility in curriculum design through feedback from locally-based module co-ordinators to key Dublin-based subject area leaders.

Action planned: The School plans to hold annual meetings between local module co-ordinators and these meetings will help to better facilitate discussion on curriculum changes that might be appropriate.

12. *Recommendation:* The suggested need for more I.T. modules on the BSc M.I.S. pathway should be investigated and implemented if appropriate.

Action planned: The School feels that the current BSc MIS pathway contains an appropriate mix of IT and business modules. However, the curriculum will be reviewed with the Head of MIS area at UCD. However, the new BSc Computer Science that is currently in the proposal stage may better meets the needs of students interest in undertaking a much more specialised IT degree.

13. *Recommendation:* The suggested need for more innovative modules in I.T. to reflect the strategic direction of Sri Lanka's niche areas in a global I.T. industry should be investigated and implemented if appropriate.

Action planned: The MIS Subject Area at UCD will be consulted in relation to the curriculum. The new MSc curriculum reflects current practice.

14. *Recommendation:* The opportunities for offering online electives or options should be explored to allow some crossover between pathway modules to allow some tailoring of programme content to students' needs, building on the spirit and experience of the UCD Horizons initiative.

Action planned: There is currently no flexibility in the programme; any proposed changes need to be assessed in light of fee structures and resource needs. Each pathway currently includes a project-based module where students have some choice in relation to the project topic.

15. *Recommendation:* There is a need to further enhance opportunities for practising presentation skills, despite the challenges of large class size, and to ensure maintenance of high standards of spoken and written English.

Action planned: As part of orientation, students will attend a workshop on presentation skills. In addition, opportunities to practice and further develop presentation skills will be provided to students during the project-based modules at Stage 3.

16. *Recommendation:* The suggested need for a module on Creativity and Innovation to satisfy emerging market requirements should be investigated and, if appropriate, developed for the existing undergraduate programmes or proposed graduate programme(s) as appropriate.

Action planned: In line with current UCD developments, a module with a focus on innovation should be designed into Masters-level programmes as soon as is practical; innovation should feature as a theme in several undergraduate modules, this will be communicated to all BSc module coordinator for adoption at the first opportunity.

17. *Recommendation:* The need to enhance the place of research methods in the curriculum should be investigated and, if appropriate, developed for the existing undergraduate programmes or proposed graduate programme(s) as appropriate to their respective graduate attributes.

Action planned: The place of research methods is currently being enhanced on both the BSc Management Research Project and Workplace Practice modules. On the MSc programme, students will be required to complete two 15 ECTS Research Papers. A substantial part of the

classes for these modules will be dedicated to the development of students' understanding of research methods and design.

18. *Recommendation:* Quality assurance in software engineering processes should underpin certain learning objectives in all relevant modules to emphasise a mindset of quality assurance in software development as an integral attribute of all graduates.

Action planned: Quality assurance in software is a very specific aim, this should be explored further between UCD module coordinators and NIBM staff.

- **Category 1(c)**

Recommendations to be implemented within five years

19. *Recommendation:* Regarding staff development, actions which would facilitate research collaborations between staff based in UCD Dublin and NIBM Colombo are recommended.

Action planned: Discussions within the School will take place to identify some means of encouraging such research collaborations. The School's Associate Dean for Research will be consulted on this matter.

<u>CATEGORY 2:</u> Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit
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- **Category 2(a)**

Recommendations already implemented

1. *Recommendation:* There is a need for UCD to enhance NIBM's access to Belfield-based online administrative systems where appropriate. A review should be undertaken of areas in which duplication of effort could be eliminated by providing access to common databases and customised software tools relevant to the collaboration. (e.g. online applications systems etc.).

Action planned: A streamlining of the UCD applications process has been implemented by the Centre for Distance Learning and the new process was implemented in advance of the commencement of the first intake on the MSc programme in July 2011. This has resulted in a more streamlined process and a reduction in the amount of duplication of effort. The administrative systems will be kept under continuous review to ensure that any duplication of effort is kept to a minimum. To deal with the difficulties that NIBM and students have encountered with the registration process, UCD will aim to provide more presence at NIBM during key registration phases.

2. *Recommendation:* Revise application, acceptance and registration process to embrace the benefits of existing hardcopy and online registration systems to reduce the complexity of the registration process.

Action planned: A more streamlined online applications process was implemented in June 2011. This new process has resulted in a move away from handling hard copies of applications.

- **Category 2(b)**

Recommendations to be implemented within one year

1. *Recommendation:* The Library resources have to meet specific peak demands and there is a continual demand for increasing the stock of multiple copies of referenced books. Satisfying this demand is difficult. Consideration should be given to alternative approaches, through joint planning by the Librarian and Module Co-ordinators, such as increasing the number of references to online resources. Greater liaison between the Librarian and Module Co-ordinators is recommended in respect of reading lists and use of online information.

Action planned: Module co-ordinators (both local and UCD) are now being actively encouraged to recommend readings which students can download from the university's online library databases. Greater utilisation of Blackboard will be made for the purposes of making reading lists available to students. It is also planned to arrange a training session for the NIBM librarian on how to use the UCD online databases and journals so that he/she is in a better position to provide assistance to local module co-ordinators.

3. *Recommendation:* Revise the system in UCD of capturing the formal names of all students irrespective of length or number of names so that academic records, transcripts and graduation parchments fully reflect the formal names of the students.

Action planned: The parchments currently accommodate the formal names of all students. However, the Centre for Distance Learning will now commence discussions with Michael Sinnott in UCD Registry to see how the formal names can be fully captured on the UCD administrative systems.

4. *Recommendation:* Blackboard – align procedures so that UCD version of Blackboard, as used in Belfield, becomes the preferred and sole tool used by students.

Action planned: The Centre for Distance Learning has been working with the School's Information and Learning Technology Group with a view to re-designing Blackboard for the Sri Lanka programmes. The new structure (where students have access to separate areas for each module and a general programme area) will go live at the end of July 2011. This new structure should ensure that much better utilisation of Blackboard is made by both UCD and local module co-ordinators and by students.

5. *Recommendation:* Blackboard – enhance training on Blackboard to staff and students.

Action planned: Training of local module co-ordinators will commence in August 2011 (using Elluminate). Training of students will take place during the orientation workshop in September each year. A follow-up online session will be scheduled in Semester 1.

The School would also like to note that the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning plans to visit NIBM in December 2011, during

which teaching and learning workshops for local module coordinators will be held.

3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section should only contain a list, prioritised by the Quality Improvement Committee, of recommendations outlined in the Review Group Report, which require additional resources. The planned action to address each recommendation with an estimate of the cost involved should also be included:

No additional resources are required to implement the recommendations outlined in this report.