



University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science

February 2011

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1. Introduction

This Report responds to the findings of a quality review of the UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Sciences (SBBS), undertaken in April 2010. The Review Group visited the School from 12th – 15th April 2010 and had meetings with School staff, University students and staff, including: the Head of School; College Principal; the UCD VP for Research, SAR Co-ordinating Committee; School academic staff; School support staff; employers of graduates; postgraduate students, taught and research; recent graduates; undergraduate students; UCD Science District Development; and UCD Library.

The final report was sent to the Head of School on 31st August 2010.

A Quality Improvement Plan was drafted and reviewed in the 1st semester of 2010-11 by the Quality Improvement Committee consisting of Dr Loraine Smith (Director of Strategic Development and Chair of Committee), Dr Gethin McBean (Head of School), Dr Jim O'Gara (Head of Postgraduate Studies), Dr Cormac Murphy (Academic Staff Member), Ms Geraldine Neylan (Administrative Staff Member), Dr Joan Simon (Technical Staff Member), Mr Robert Radford (Postgraduate student) and Dr Helen O'Donovan (Postdoctoral Staff Member).

These staff members agreed the response process to the Quality Review at a meeting held on 8th November 2010. Four members of the committee were given the responsibility to interact with relevant School committees as follows to review the commendations and recommendations of the Review Group:

Dr Loraine Smith	Recommendations on Strategy Organisation and Management External Relations Research Activity
Dr Gethin McBean	Staff and Facilities Support Services
Dr Cormac Murphy	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Curriculum Development and Review Management of Quality and Enhancement
Dr Jim O'Gara	Postgraduate Affairs Management of Quality and Enhancement

The QI Committee met on regular occasions to ensure consensus across staff cohorts and to ensure that the final QIP was coherent across all three categories. The School response to this Report is attached at Appendix 1.

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

Rec #	Recommendation	Category	Response	Timescale
2.5	Develop a robust business plan for the School that addresses the current financial challenges in order to protect and promote its ambition to sustain research and teaching excellence.	1	The School is in the process of developing an updated business plan.	A
3.6	The School should explore the possibility of creating a School Management Group (SMG), as a sub-group of the School Executive Committee, to effectively support the Head of School, in particular in relation to current and future financial priorities.	1	A Business Management Group has been put together by the Head of School to develop the updated business plan recommended in 2.5.	A
3.7	The School should include additional staff within its Executive Committee beyond the Heads of Subjects. The Executive Committee should include a representative from the technical and administrative support staff.	1	The School currently has a member of administrative staff in attendance at The School Executive Committee who takes minutes for the meeting. In the absence of a Chief Technical Officer The HOS will explore including a representative, on relevant committees, from the technical staff (rotating between staff nominated of either discipline or geographical location as deemed appropriate). Both administrative and technical representative will be invited to the relevant committee when dealing with issues relating to that staff cohort, specifically The School Executive Committee and the Teaching and Learning Committee.	A
3.8	The School should also explore how it could have a fuller engagement with all staff members (and in particular with new staff members) in School committees. Opportunities to facilitate a forum for regular staff interaction with the Head of School should be explored.	1	Regular School meetings with all staff currently take place. In addition the School will invite new members of staff to sit on committees or to input into committees as appropriate.	B
3.9	School committees require a clear remit, which should be communicated to all staff. Committee minutes should be available for all staff and committees should communicate effectively with School colleagues	1	All committees will develop clear remits and report to the School Executive on a regular basis. With the exception of Executive minutes, which are confidential, minutes for School committees are currently available on a shared drive. In addition all members of the School will continue to be informed about the latest developments through regular school meetings.	B
3.10	While the changing financial conditions are recognised, the School must act to exert control over its own budget and be more proactive in taking its future into its own hands. This will involve a wider understanding among academic staff, of the financial incentives in particular decisions and for how resources are deployed. It is not clear if all academic staff and committees understand how, and why, decisions are made, or the constraints on decision-making.	1	The Business Management Group will enable the School to present a strong case for the development of the School with decisions made being presented for discussion at regular school meetings. However it is recognised that the provision of the necessary resources to develop in the short to medium term will be contingent upon generation of new income which is being achieved through development of post-graduate places.	B
Category		Timescale		
1= in control of unit		A = already implemented		
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Rec #	Recommendation	Category	Response	Timescale
3.11	At present, the School has identified the absence of a Chief Technical Officer as an issue to be addressed in relation to the line management of the technical support team. The lack of a clear management chain for technical staff is leading to an ineffective use of the technical staff resource. In the interim, this may be addressed through allocating one technical officer as a liaison person for the technical team, to interact with the Head of School, or alternatively appoint an academic staff member to act as an interim line manager for the technical staff. In addition, the School technical staff should have team meetings more regularly, to improve interaction and communication between technical staff who were previously located in different schools.	3	It is anticipated that the School will recruit a Chief Technical Officer once in a financial position to do so. There is currently a moratorium on recruitment unless it is associated with an increase in income. In the interim the formation of a Technical Staff Committee with a rotating chair will be set up and this technical liaison person will be invited onto Committees as indicated in 3.7.	A/C
4.9	The balance between research and teaching activities appears uncertain. There is a notional 40:40:20 division between research, teaching and administrative time, but how far it is appropriate to deviate from this in individual cases appears undecided. Burdens on staff, in time and responsibility, should be monitored by a workload model that is clear and open, so that staff can understand that their load allocation is fair, and that senior management can recognise clearly, which aspects of academic responsibilities most need support or attention by changes in working practice.	1	An academic staff workload model has been developed and is in the process of being implemented.	A
4.10	Clear and open statements are needed about the obligations (in time and responsibility), entailed by allocated undergraduate teaching duties, and a mentoring system for younger staff, to help them fulfill these efficiently and effectively. There needs to be a common understanding within the School, that postgraduate supervision entails a contract between supervisor and student, with clearly specified expectations of the supervisor's role, and monitoring of this contract by a postgraduate Committee.	1	1. The School Teaching and Learning Committee will draw up/revise a code of practice relating to obligations in undergraduate teaching. 2. The effectiveness of the current mentoring system will be reviewed. 3. The postgraduate Committee will actively monitor / review Doctoral Studies Panel and TA reports, which are a formal record of the research and professional plans of the student and their progress. postgraduate Committee (and HOS as required) will meet at least twice annually to resolve problems arising with individual students.	1. B 2. A/B 3. B
4.11	A substantial proportion of staff teaching time is devoted, nominally in some cases and actually in others, to supervising undergraduate practical classes; this is counterproductive and practice should be changed on this.	1	Revision of undergraduate class teaching is underway but will not result in total disassociation of academic staff from practicals ; a Committee has been formed to oversee this.	A/B
4.12	It is particularly important that younger, newly-recruited staff, be directly involved in their own hands-on research as much as possible, and for this, it is essential that they be adequately protected from over-commitment to other duties.	1	This is already school policy; the workload model ensures visibility of this. A review of the effectiveness of the current mentoring system for new staff will also be carried out to ensure oversight of this.	A/B
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4.13	Support for sabbatical leave is of the highest importance in staff development, especially for a university in UCD's geographical position, and the Review Group would wish to see it encouraged as far as financial constraints will permit.	1	Staff currently avail of UCD sabbatical leave. It is unlikely that this will be actively encouraged at present due to reduced resources and increased workloads however it will be encouraged once financial circumstances improve.	C
4.14	The numbers of support staff are adequate, even generous. A greater awareness of the career development possibilities for technical staff would be desirable. The School should explore possibilities for deploying these staff to greater effect in providing more focused support to academics, especially in periods outside the teaching semesters.	1	Career Development opportunities for staff are being implemented through the UCD staff Development office in consultation with UCD technical staff. In addition a technical staff skills training programme is being rolled out in the School that will enable greater participation in research labs as a result of upskilling in research techniques.	A/B
4.15	Support facilities for both staff and students are recognised by all to be capable of improvement from their current delocalised state. A single site for the School would be beneficial.	1	This is a stated aim of the school, but not entirely within the control of the school.	B/C
5.4	Professional training of demonstrators, which should include practise marking and feedback with templates, to ensure consistency and quality of a) assessments and b) feedback.	1	This is very high on the Teaching and Learning agenda; formal training of demonstrators will be implemented in Semester 2 of 10/11 academic year (BMOL40080 plus 1-day training course). Module co-ordinators will be required to provide formalised feedback on each demonstrator. Technical staff are inputting into the process re: recommended training.	A-C
5.5	Active encouragement of staff training through courses in teaching, learning and assessment.	1	Staff are already informed and encouraged to participate.	A
5.6	Regular formal formative feedback to students throughout the curriculum.	1	Staff will be encouraged to do this by employing the methods detailed on www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources .	B
6.6	The School should consider the whole balance of learning objectives across the curriculum, and consider whether it is meeting these most efficiently by its present practises.	1	A mapping exercise has already been completed and will be repeated on a regular basis. Re-organisation of stage 2 is underway.	A
6.7	Without prejudging the decisions made on practical teaching, there must be a process of careful reflection on how best to use finite resources, and how best to support the quality of undergraduate learning against a full range of defined learning objectives.	1	Practical teaching should be of the highest standard. We are currently introducing changes to stage 2 in consultation with the Dean of Science, to improve the quality of the practical skills acquired by students	B
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7.5	Further enhancing international collaborations, and recruitment of research-oriented postdoctoral workers and staff with an international background, is strongly recommended as a strategy appropriate for the pursuit of a high level of international excellence.	3	It is common practice within the School to advertise these positions worldwide, reflected in the high degree of internationalisation of our research staff in general. However, it is essential to note that under the current framework surrounding retention of research staff, it is very difficult for us to aspire to recruit or retain postdoctoral workers with an international background. Refer also to response to point 7.6.	A
7.6	Compared to leading UK institutions, the number of established postdoctoral researchers funded through international collaborations is low, and there appear to be no long-term postdoctoral research fellows of the sort who are the mainstay of many leading research laboratories. The Review Group appreciates that this is partly due to legislative restraints, and recommends that UCD further develop its protocols on research careers to facilitate the recruitment and retention of postdoctoral researchers.	2	The School is in complete agreement with this recommendation; UCD policy prevents the long-term retention of postdoctoral fellows. The limitation of structures put in place by the University in response to the Fixed Term Workers Act has been taken up by the Head of School in a letter to the Vice Principal for Research and the Vice Principal for Staff outlining the opposition within SBBS to the introduction of the UCD Research Skills & Career Development (RS&CD) Framework.	C
7.7	The low number of postdoctoral researchers is partly due to UCD's somewhat unusual financial model. Graduate student numbers are a major driver of school income attribution, which may not be sustainable given the anticipated reduction of Irish sources of external research funding. The Review Group recommends that the potential impact of reduced SFI and similar funding, and its causes, become generally understood within the School.	1	The relatively high number of postgraduates to postdoctoral staff is due to more funding being available for postgraduate positions. Academic staff members within the School are acutely aware of the reduction in research funds, even since the Quality Assurance Budget. SBBS PIs are continuing to apply for both exchequer and non exchequer funding, both nationally and internationally but success rates are becoming more constrained by limited funding available by granting organizations and, indeed, industry. As a means of possibly addressing the shortfall in funding, at least in part, and ensure staff do not become research inactive, the School is in the process of disseminating MSc projects, funded through additional fees, to sustain research in the short to medium term. In due course the School would like to establish a limited number of funded thematic PhD positions within the School through a similar funding mechanism.	A
7.8	The availability of SFI grants has, to some extent, meant a lack of engagement with other funding sources. An important lesson for the future – there are strengths in a mixed economy and diversification of sources of funding. The Review Group recommends the development of a systematic approach to diversifying research funding sources.	1	There is a significant funding from non SFI agencies within SBBS including FP7, The Wellcome Trust, the EPA, the NIH, FIRM, The HRB and Teagasc. This diversification is further expanding evidenced by recent success in large scale EU, and Wellcome Trust funding. The School also actively engages with Enterprise Ireland and the IDA to exploit inventions, increase patenting and develop spin out companies.	A
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8.3	There is an opportunity to engage more fully with employers and to create a dialogue surrounding skills and employers' needs.	1	There is ongoing engagement with industry in the development of MSc programmes specifically to ensure necessary workplace skills are developed by graduates. Feedback from this process is given to the School Executive to inform undergraduate programmes.	A
8.4	Although good practice in relation to teaching evaluation and in developing student feedback can be identified, this is perhaps inconsistent across the School, and requires attention from the School Teaching & Learning Committee. There is an opportunity to develop a more consistent approach to module and programme evaluation.	1	There is a university-wide student feedback programme that the School's modules are included in. We also have subject evaluations for stage 3 and 4, and programme evaluations.	A
8.5	There should be a staff-student Committee for graduate students, to fully engage with representatives of the large numbers of doctoral students in the School. PhD information about how to deal with supervisor difficulties, which should be communicated to all PhD students through effective pastoral care – currently not all PhD students seem to be aware of how to address difficulties	1	The Postgraduate Committee has agreed that 2 PhD students will be invited to join the Committee to represent the views of our graduate students. Nominations will be sought from PhD students and if more than 2 students go forward, an election will be held.	B
8.6	Doctoral students' Research and Professional Development Plans (RPDPs), could be used to greater effect as a mechanism to address and monitor PhD student progress.	1	A Feedback Form will be used to capture positive and negative feedback from graduate students on an annual basis. Reports from Doctoral Studies Panel and Transfer Assessment meetings will be formally reviewed by the Postgraduate Committee and used to follow the progress of all PhD students. When problems are identified the Head of Graduate Studies and if necessary the HOS will liaise with the student and supervisor to achieve a timely resolution.	B
8.7	Additional training for Post Docs and PhDs involved in laboratory practicals should be explored, particularly surrounding assessment of student work.	1	The new postgraduate teaching module BMOL40080 has addressed this issue. Post Docs are not typically involved in undergraduate laboratory classes.	A-C
8.8	The School Teaching & Learning Committee should explore mentoring and support for new academic staff, in relation to establishing new modules (in terms of content, learning and	1	A college mentoring system is in place; mentors will be identified. A Stokes mentoring policy has also been developed by the School which has been fully rolled out.	B
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9.4	The Review Group recommends that the School plans for its future IT needs (e.g. large computer laboratories). Every effort should be made to ensure that the IT Helpdesk is responsive to School issues.	1	The School has an IT liaison staff member who will propose better interaction between schools and the IT service through active engagement on an IT Committee.	B
9.5	Ensure that funding continues for journals which are key to SBBS research. An SBBS academic staff member should be given responsibility for liaison with the UCD Library.	1	A School liaison person is already in place; the library will be added to the School Executive Committee agenda, as appropriate, to improve communication with staff in school.	A
9.6	An overview of the School budget should be explained to the whole School at least annually. The UCD College of Life Sciences Finance Office might be in a position to support this.	1	This has been initiated and will be rolled out on an annual basis.	A
9.7	UCD IT Services should be consulted for the delivery of distance learning courses.	1	Initial meetings have already taken place with media services in relation to the development of modules associated with the taught masters programmes. In addition the Directors of these programmes have written a successful application for an Educational Technologist who will be made available once the moratorium on recruitment is lifted.	B
9.8	The School should participate in the Academic Mentoring programme.	1	The School does participate in the Academic Mentoring Programme.	A
9.9	The UCD Career Development Service should be engaged to help undergraduate and postgraduate students in exploring career options.	1	The School is engaging with the Career Development Service and are in the process of developing an accredited module for the MSc programmes within the School. Once developed aspects of this module could be rolled out further to undergraduate students.	A
9.10	The School should develop and administer the Structured PhD programme, including the organisation of/notification to the PhD student of the Doctoral Studies Panel and its proposed meetings, the Transfer Assessment and course requirements.	1	PhD students and supervisors will be reminded to arrange Doctoral Studies Panel and Transfer Assessment meetings. Meeting reports will be collated and reviewed by the Postgraduate Committee.	B
10.4	An academic staff member with a clear specific remit should have responsibility for the School's external relations.	1	External relations for the School are being dealt with at the level at which it is appropriate. Enhancing relationships with funding agencies / industry otherwise falls under the remit of the DOSD.	A-C
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10.5	Initiate a sabbaticals/staff exchange programme to increase visibility abroad and encourage inward exchange visits.	1	UCD already has a system for going on sabbatical which the staff avail of.	N/A
10.6	Work with the Alumni Office to track the destination of SBBS students.	1	This is within the remit of the School Manager and will be fully implemented by the end of 2011.	B
10.7	Enhance relationships with funding agencies and other governmental bodies (e.g. SFI, EI, IDA).	1	EI have been invited to the School on a number of occasions. This will be further rolled out to the IDA, EPA and other appropriate governmental bodies.	A
10.8	Set up a School advisory board with external representation from industry	1	This will be done within this academic year.	A
10.9	Develop work placements (in addition to those currently organised by Microbiology), for undergraduate and postgraduate students, in order to further the employment prospects of graduates and deepen links with industry.	1	Work placements are being developed for the MSc programmes to improve employability prospects of students and enhance collaboration with industry. Workplacement are also available to a limited number of PhD students.	A
10.10	The School should adopt a professional approach to its external relations with a proper marketing/communications drive.	1	Communication with external audiences takes place through exhibitions, the School newsletter and the website. In addition the School plans to engage with the media to further promote its profile.	B
10.11	Work with UCD Communications on SBBS branding.		This is within the remit of the School Manager and will be implemented by the end of 2011.	B
10.12	Invite recent graduates to inform curriculum development, deliver career advice and strengthen links with alumni	1	This has been done for the development of the MSc programmes and will be rolled out to undergraduate programmes.	B
10.13	Organise visits for SBBS staff and students to a range of industries.	1	This is ongoing within the MSc programmes and will be further rolled out to undergraduates.	A
10.14	Develop a list of key personnel as contact points in industry.	1	A list of contact points for key personnel in industry has been developed. This will be further expanded with the assistance of adjunct 'academics' from industry.	B
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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:

These points are highlighted below under two headings: (A) Co-location of Staff and (B) Staffing.

(A) Co-location of staff:

There were two major recommendations in this area made by the Review Group:

1. The administrative staff should be centralised into one location and should be organised to best support the priorities of the School.
2. Support facilities for both staff and students are recognised by all to be capable of improvement from their current delocalised state. A single site for the School would be beneficial.

RESPONSE:

The plans in response to these recommendations have been outlined in the body of the Quality Improvement Plan. However we would reiterate that there is an urgent need to co-locate staff in updated facilities, in particular those still housed in Ardmore annex. Administrative staff is located within the Health Sciences Centre, with the exception of three administrative staff members associated with the undergraduate office in the Conway Institute and one administrative staff member located in Ardmore House. Technical staff will be moved in conjunction with the co-location of all teaching activities in UCD Life sciences to a dedicated building and the remaining academic staff in Ardmore House will be rehoused as part of the Competence Centre funded by Enterprise Ireland and by funds derived under PRTLI-5. The ultimate aim is to co-locate all administrative staff within the Science Centre as recommended by the Quality Review group.

The concentration of all Life Sciences teaching activities in a dedicated building implies that teaching support facilities are shared with other schools, in particular with the SBES. To address these imminent changes in preparation and delivery of teaching activities, in particular practicals, it is essential that the activities of the technical staff are consolidated into one management structure under the leadership of a Chief Technical Officer (CTO).

(B) Staffing:

There were five primary recommendations made by the Review Group which have staffing implications:

1. Develop a robust business plan for the School that addresses the current financial challenges in order to protect and promote its ambition to sustain research and teaching excellence.
2. While the changing financial conditions are recognised, the School must act to exert control over its own budget and be more proactive in taking its future into its own hands.

3. At present, the School has identified the absence of a Chief Technical Officer as an issue to be addressed in relation to the line management of the technical support team. The lack of a clear management chain for technical staff is leading to an ineffective use of the technical staff resource.
4. A substantial proportion of staff teaching time is devoted, nominally in some cases and actually in others, to supervising undergraduate practical classes; this is counterproductive and practice should be changed on this.
5. Without prejudging the decisions made on practical teaching, there must be a process of careful reflection on how best to use finite resources, and how best to support the quality of undergraduate learning against a full range of defined learning objectives.

RESPONSE:

In response to the recommendation to develop a robust business plan to address the current financial challenges a School Management Group has been put together with this remit. Following initial meetings it was decided that the main mechanism for the school to address the current financial constraints is the generation of new income through the development, expansion and internationalisation of Masters Programmes. Two new programmes were rolled out in May 2010 generating an income of €400,000 based on an intake of 24 students in the first year.

There has been significant national and international interest in these programmes since their advertisement in May 2010. As a result we are confident that, provided the necessary resources are made available, student numbers can be increased from the current cohort of 24 (36 FTEs) to 60 (90 FTEs) with a total gross income of over €1 Million. At least a quarter of places on these programmes will be made available to international students, thus contributing to UCD's strategic aim of increasing the number of international students.

To ensure the continuing success of these MSc programmes, commitment to quality of both content and management of the programmes is essential. The successful management and further development of these programmes includes the development of new post-graduate modules. This is necessary to ensure quality of the programmes and to bridge the interface between core scientific disciplines and technology. Other plans include roll out to post-experience graduates and provision of modules to industry on the basis of continuous professional development as well as the development of online courses.

The further development and consolidation of the two MSc programmes requires consolidation of academic numbers, which have been declining steadily over the last 5 years. Academic staff numbers have dropped by 10% from 37.3 FTEs (School Plan 2006/07) to 33.75 FTEs (RAM 2010/11); during this time there has been a concomitant increase in undergraduate teaching together with the introduction of 2 taught masters programmes within the School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science. This level of activity cannot be sustained into the future with continued erosion of staff numbers.

The further development and consolidation of the two MSc programmes also requires many activities that typically are not carried out by academic staff in the development of undergraduate modules including: outreach with industry and other governmental bodies, programme marketing, screening applications, engaging external teaching staff, development of business plans etc. The School Director of Strategic Development who is on a five year contract is at present responsible for these activities as well as the overall development of these programmes. The greater workload associated with the maintenance, development and expansion of the

Masters programs requires that provision be made to continue this function by an appropriately qualified person. Failure to address this will result in significantly reduced potential to increase numbers to 60 resulting in a loss of income to UCD of €3 million over five years.

Internationalisation is a key strategic objective for both UCD and the School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science. To enable this objective an increase in international students within the school at both undergraduate and postgraduate level is planned. This requires expertise and retention of this expertise for international student recruitment within the School. This is currently being provided by the Director of Strategic Development.

In response to the recommendations above made by the Review Group regarding teaching activities including practical classes and technical staff we feel that appointment of a Chief Technical Officer is of high priority. The CTO will fulfill a critical role in managing the delivery of teaching by technical staff in a new facility in the Science Centre that centralises all teaching activities in Life Sciences. In addition the CTO will play a crucial role in managing technical support for the research activities of the school.

The School's prioritisation for staffing is as follows:

1. The appointment of a permanent member of staff to direct /manage the two MSc programmes for the School newly rolled out in 2010-2011.
2. The appointment of a Chief Technical Officer.

Note: The Quality Improvement Plan should be used to inform School/Support Unit and College level academic, support service and resource planning activities.