University College Dublin

**Programme Review of Overseas Degree Programmes offered by
UCD School of Business in association with
Asia Pacific Management Institute Kaplan in Hong Kong and Singapore**

Quality Improvement Plan
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Centre for Distance Learning
UCD School of Business

October 2008

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Contents

1. Introduction

Between November 2007 and February 2008, UCD School of Business undertook a comprehensive review and self-assessment of its Hong Kong and Singapore programmes, including a review of the key elements of the current programmes management, delivery and assessment mechanisms and quality assurance processes.

The preparation of the self-assessment report involved three stages (preparation, data collection and data analysis) as detailed below.

(a) *Preparation*:
   The self-assessment committee met, discussed and reviewed the Quality Assurance guidelines provided. The aims and importance of the process were then communicated to all appropriate staff, including UCD academic and professional staff and staff of our partner – APMI Kaplan (hereafter referred to as APMI).

(b) *Data Collection*:
   Both secondary and primary data were used in preparing this report. The secondary source material included prior reports (internal and external); brochures; web pages – institutional and governmental; student module evaluations (2004 – 2007) and educational commentaries. To supplement this information primary data were collected by way of questionnaires administered to current students (Hong Kong & Singapore), module co-ordinators (local and UCD), APMI Programme Managers and APMI Marketing Managers. The purpose of the questionnaires was to elicit feedback on all aspects of programme design, management and delivery from key programme stakeholders. Feedback from employers, as a stakeholder, was sought by means of written testimonials. Interviews were also completed with senior executives from APMI.

(c) *Data Management and Analysis:*
   Drawing on primary and secondary data, a draft QA report was prepared. The draft report was circulated to all pertinent staff (academic and professional) in both UCD School of Business and in APMI. Feedback was incorporated as appropriate when finalising the report for the UCD Director of Quality Assurance.

Following the completion of a self-assessment report, a site visit took place on 7 March 2008 in Hong Kong and on 10 March 2008 in Singapore.

To facilitate the implementation of a Quality Improvement Plan in respect of UCD School of Business and its Hong Kong and Singapore programmes, a committee has now been 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 APMI, as follows:

UCD:
- Prof. Tom Begley, Dean, UCD School of Business
- Prof. Aidan Kelly, Programme Director, Hong Kong and Singapore Programmes, UCD School of Business
- Prof. Pat Gibbons, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, UCD School of Business
- Dr. Ann Bourke, Head of Teaching and Learning, UCD School of Business
- Linda Dowling, Associate Director, Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business
- Antonio Garzon-Vico, Programme Manager, Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business
- Ewa Barycka, Programme Administrator, Centre for Distance Learning, UCD School of Business

APMI:
- Rebecca Lui, Senior Manager, APMI Hong Kong
- Danny Suen, Senior Manager, APMI Hong Kong
- Leon Choong, Executive Director, APMI Singapore
- Stephen Li, Senior Manager, APMI Singapore

2. Response to Recommendations in the Review Group Report

Category 1

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

Category 2

Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit

Category 3

Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Recommendations for Improvements

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

Category 1(a)

Recommendations already implemented

a. Academic

1. Recommendation: The UCD School of Business should keep the curriculum under regular review.

   Action taken: The curriculum for each programme is kept under continuous review by the relevant Programme Board and also by the programme team. The curriculum is reviewed on an annual basis in conjunction with Heads of Subject Areas and any changes are submitted to the Programme Board(s) for consideration and approval. Close consultation also takes places on a regular basis with APMI with a view to ensuring that the curriculum content meets the needs of the local context also.

2. Recommendation: The informal meetings held between UCD lecturers and local staff should be made formal.

   Action taken: The Centre for Distance Learning (CDL) has been in discussions with APMI on this matter. It has been agreed that these meetings will be formalised with immediate effect. Minutes will be retained of all meetings and formal records maintained by the CDL. It is also planned to hold more formal meetings between UCD Heads of Subject Areas and local lecturers in that subject area on a regular basis (these meetings will take place during teaching visits to Hong Kong and Singapore by the Heads of Subject Areas). A number of such meetings have already been held (Marketing subject area – June 2008 in both Hong Kong and Singapore; Accountancy subject area – August 2008 in Singapore; Management subject area – August 2008 in Hong Kong; MIS subject area – scheduled for October 2008 in Singapore).

   The purpose of these meetings is to provide an opportunity for discussion on general module delivery and assessment issues, including exam paper preparation, grading, grade distributions etc. These meetings also provide an opportunity for local lecturers to provide feedback on module delivery and assessment strategies and provides an opportunity for them to share experiences with a member of staff from the University in the same subject area.

   Furthermore, a Teaching and Learning workshop on grading and assessment was delivered by the UCD College of Business and Law Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning, in both Hong Kong and Singapore in May 2008. It is planned to hold these kinds of workshops on a more regular basis.

In addition, a quarterly newsletter has been introduced and this has been specifically designed for local lecturers (the first issue was circulated in August 2008). This newsletter will be used to disseminate relevant teaching/learning policy information and relevant programme information to local lecturers. Furthermore, during August 2008 the CDL introduced a web conferencing facility and it is planned to use this facility to keep in contact with local lecturers on a more regular basis.

b. Organisational

Recommendation: 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.

Action taken: The CDL has been in discussions with its partner institution, APMI, on this matter. It is planned to hold meetings between staff of the School of Business and senior staff members within APMI once or twice per year. The aim of these meetings will be to highlight student numbers, student progression, student drop-out rates, procedural arrangements locally, administrative/management developments, difficulties which have emerged and to discuss current and planned intakes. It has been agreed that minutes will be taken at all meetings held between APMI and UCD. Minutes will be forwarded immediately afterwards to the CDL at UCD School of Business who, in conjunction with APMI, will address any issues requiring follow-up action on the part of the University. All records of meetings between UCD and APMI, including minutes, will be retained on file in the CDL. Indeed, the Programme Director visited Singapore in July 2008 and held a number of meetings with senior management of APMI and also the Programme Management team. Further meetings are scheduled for October and November 2008.

Category 1(b)

Recommendations to be implemented within one year

a. Academic

1. Recommendation: The UCD School of Business and APMI should consider the introduction of a stated minimum level of English language competency on its entry requirements.

   Action taken: In Singapore, English is the first language and the School is satisfied that the University's English language requirements are being met in full. In the case of Hong Kong, where an applicant has completed their primary, secondary or previous third level education through English, he/she will be deemed to have met the programme's English language requirement. However, where this is not the case, the applicant will be asked to undertake a TOEFL or IELTS test. Where it is not possible for the applicant to take one of these tests, an interview will be held locally with a senior member of the Management team, in addition to a telephone interview conducted by UCD.

2. Recommendation: The current Advanced Standing Qualifications should be revisited in accordance with UCD academic governance, in particular, the policy document on *Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL): Certificated Learning*. The School and APMI should liase with the UCD Admissions Office and/or Registry on revising and refreshing this list.

   Action taken: The School has commenced discussions with APMI to review the current Advanced Standing Qualifications (ASQ) list with a view to identifying and removing any qualifications, which seem inactive and which are no longer considered appropriate for APL recognition.

3. Recommendation: The UCD School of Business should establish an annual programme monitoring system across the two delivery locations.

   Action taken: This is a matter for the relevant Programme Boards within the School and the matter will be tabled at one of the early Programme Boards scheduled in 08/09.

4. Recommendation: The School and APMI should consider the introduction of additional tutorial support (Hong Kong only). 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.

   Action taken: The School has considered this matter and proposes to introduce an office hours system for programmes in Hong Kong. During these office hours, students will be encouraged to meet with the module lecturer and to discuss module topics, assessment requirements etc. This initiative has already been implemented in Singapore, with the UCD Programme Director scheduled to be available for office hours appointments with students in October, November and December 2008. In the future, all lecturers (both UCD and local) will be encouraged to advise students of their office hours and will be available to discuss all aspects of their modules with students during these hours.

5. Recommendation: 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.

   Action taken: For a number of reasons (differences in semester timetables on domestic and overseas programmes and the work and family commitments of the vast majority of students on these programmes), a semester on campus may not always be feasible. However, the School does encourage students interested in attending the UCD campus for a semester to make contact with their Programme Manager who will explore the options available with the School. The School and APMI will also seek feedback from students undertaking these programmes to establish the feasibility and desirability of implementing a study trip initiative.

b. Organisational

1. Recommendation: The University and the UCD School of Business should maintain and develop links with alumni similar to that of graduates from Dublin.

   Action taken: The CDL will liase with the School's new Alumni Relations Director with a view to establishing more formal and regular links with our alumni in both Hong Kong and Singapore. The Alumni Relations Director visited APMI Hong Kong in July 2008 and commenced discussions on this matter with APMI staff. It is also hoped that the Alumni Relations Director will visit Singapore within the next twelve months, possibly during the next local graduation in April 2009 to help re-connect with UCD's alumni. At that stage, the Alumni Relations Director will be introduced to the Irish Ambassador in Singapore, who is a strong supporter of UCD's programmes and who has taken a keen interest in helping develop the pool of local Irish alumni.

2. Recommendation: 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.

   Action taken: During July 2008, the CDL issued to students a step-by-step guide to using UCD online resources. In addition to this, the CDL will implement a training programme for APMI staff on how to use UCD's online library resources (this will comprise a step-by-step set of guidelines and a powerpoint presentation on how to access and use these resources). The first training session is scheduled to take place in Singapore in November 2008. APMI staff will then be in a position to demonstrate the use of these resources during student orientation. In addition, the CDL is currently developing a dedicated website for new entrants to each programme, which will provide a step-by-step guide on both blackboard and UCD Connect. This will help to further familiarise students with the use of these resources. It is anticipated that the website will be available in December 2008.

3. Recommendation: The Review Group recommends that a Student Forum be established as soon as possible.

   Action taken: Discussions on this matter were held with APMI in July 2008 (Singapore) and October 2008 (Hong Kong). The purpose of these discussions was to consider the various ways in which a student forum might be implemented and conducted on each programme. It was agreed that five student nominations would be sought from each intake who will meet with a UCD/APMI team once each semester to discuss any issues of concern and to provide general feedback to the programme management team. Minutes of these meetings will be taken by APMI and sent to the CDL for follow-up, where necessary, and filing.

4. Recommendation: 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.

Action taken: As a result of recent correspondence (June 2008) between the UCD Director of Quality Assurance and the Principal of the College of Business and Law, a template for collaborative agreements has now been circulated and the School is in the process of putting in place new collaborative agreements for all Hong Kong and Singapore programmes. It is planned to complete this task by December 2008, with revised collaborative agreements in place from 1st January 2009.

Category 1(c)

Recommendations to be implemented within five years

a. Academic

1. Recommendation: 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.

   Action taken: The School intends to introduce two Programme Extern examiners for the Hong Kong and Singapore programmes – one for quantitative modules and one for qualitative modules. It is the School's understanding that the University is currently developing a policy on the external examiner process. Once this policy has been finalised, the School will begin shortlisting potential programme externs.

Category 1(d)

Recommendations which will not be implemented

All recommendations will be implemented.

Category 2: Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit

Category 2(a)

Recommendations already implemented
None.

Category 2(b)

Recommendations to be implemented within one year

a. Services

1. Recommendation: The University i.e. UCD HR and UCD IT Services should address the issue(s) that inhibits the rolling out of Blackboard access to local tutors.

   Action taken: During May 2008, discussions took place between UCD HR, UCD IT Services and the CDL with a view to issuing blackboard accounts to APMI staff and local lecturers. Blackboard access has now been

arranged for all APMI programme management staff. Access for local lecturers is in the process of being granted and it is expected that accounts will be issued during October 2008. In the future, newly appointed local lecturers will receive their account at the appointment stage.

2. Recommendation: 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

   Action taken: The CDL anticipates that student cards will be issued in a much more timely manner in future as a result of the implementation of the online SRI tool. In addition, close attention will be paid to the quality of student cards to be issued and any concerns with the quality will be raised immediately with the Student Services Manager (Student Desk).

3. Recommendation: Programme descriptors should be put in place for each degree programme.

   Action taken: Currently, the programme descriptor tool is not available through UCD's online services. This issue is currently being explored with SYSDEM by the College Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning. Once the programme descriptor tool is available, descriptors will be created for each Hong Kong and Singapore based on the existing programme outcomes information contained in the programme promotional materials.

b. Procedures

1. Recommendation: UCD needs to refresh and revisit the Code of Conduct for the Operation of Overseas Programmes (Governing Authority, 2000).

   Action taken: The University is currently reviewing the Governing Authority Code (2000) of Conduct.

2. Recommendation: 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.

   Action taken: The Head of UCD School of Business is currently liasing with the Registrar on this matter with a view to clarifying the existing Extenuating Circumstances policy to cover work commitments. The College of Business and Law Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning has also written formally to the Registrar on this matter. It is intended that any amendment to the policy would apply to students registered to part-time programmes only (students would be required to submit an extenuating circumstances form and supporting documentation).

3. Recommendation: 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.

   Action taken: A copy of this report will be forwarded to the UCD Director of Quality Assurance.

Category 2(c)

Recommendations to be implemented within five years

All recommendations will be implemented within one year, where not already implemented.

Category 2(d)

Recommendations which will not be implemented

All recommendations will be implemented.

Category 3: Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Not applicable.

3.   Prioritised Resource Requirements

The Committee believes that the recommendations and follow-up action required to implement these recommendations can be undertaken within the current resource provision on these programmes, with the exception of the following:

1. The scheduling of office hours will incur additional costs for the university and it is anticipated that staff will need to be remunerated on an hourly basis (at the same rate paid for teaching - €190.46 per hour).

Note: The Quality Improvement Plan should be used at School and College level academic and resource planning activities, to inform funding allocation decisions.