



University College Dublin

Periodic Quality Review

UCD School of Biology & Environmental Science

April 2014

Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 21 October 2014

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1. Introduction and Overview of UCD School of Biology & Environmental Science

Introduction

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the School of Biology & Environmental Science, University College Dublin, which was undertaken on 31 March – 3 April 2014. The School's response to the Review Group Report is attached as Appendix 1.

The Review Process

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997, and international good practice (e.g. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2007). Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.

- 1.3 The purpose of periodic review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this developmental process in order to effect improvement, including :

- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning opportunities
- To monitor research activity, including: management of research activity; assessing the research performance with regard to research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
- To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards
- To provide a framework within which the unit can continue to work in the future towards quality improvement
- To identify shortfalls in resources and provide an externally validated case for change and/or increased resources
- To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice
- To identify challenges and address these
- To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality review procedures also enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997.

1.4 Typically, the review model comprises four major elements:

- Preparation of a self-assessment report (SAR)
- A visit by a review group (RG) that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period
- Preparation of a review group report that is made public
- Agreement of an action plan for improvement (quality improvement plan) based on the RG report's recommendations. The University will also monitor progress against the improvement plan

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: www.ucd.ie/quality.

1.5 The composition of the Review Group for the UCD School of Biology & Environmental Science was as follows:

- Professor Tadhg O'Keeffe, UCD School of Archaeology (Chair)
- Professor Torres Sweeney, UCD School of Veterinary Medicine (Deputy Chair)
- Professor Michael T. Siva-Jothy, University of Sheffield, UK (Extern)
- Professor Keith Lindsey, Durham University, UK (Extern)

1.6 The Review Group visited the School from 31 March – 3 April 2014 and held meetings with School staff; undergraduate and postgraduate students; the SAR Co-ordinating Committee; other University staff, including the College Principal. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 2.

1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation provided by the School and the University during the site visit.

Preparation of the Self-assessment Report (SAR)

1.8 Following a briefing from the UCD Quality Officer in March 2013, a Self-assessment Report Coordinating Committee (SARCC) comprising the members of the School Management Group and representatives from the School's technical officers and administrative staff was put in place. Members of the SAR coordinating committee drafted relevant sections of the report and sought input from relevant staff members and students throughout. Committee membership and responsibility for Report chapters are set out below:

Member	Position	Responsibility
Dr. Wieland Fricke	Lecturer	Chair, SARCC Chapters 3, 6
Dr. Tommy Gallagher	Head of School (to 12/2013) Senior Lecturer	Chapters 1-3, 8
Prof. Jeremy Simpson	Head of School (from 01/2014) Professor	Chapter 9
Dr. Evelyn Doyle	Head of Teaching & Learning Senior Lecturer	Chapter 4
Dr. Kay Nolan	Head of Graduate Studies Senior Lecturer	Chapter 7
Prof. Nicholas Clipson	Head of Research, Innovation & Scholarship Associate Professor	Chapter 5
Susan Wilson	Administrator Senior Executive Assistant	All
Gwyneth MacMaster	Technical Officers' Representative Senior Technical Officer	Chapters 3, 5

- 1.9 The SAR Coordinating Committee had its first meeting in September 2013. Subsequent meetings were held on the 18th September, 2nd October, 16th October, 30th October, 13th November, 27th November and 4th December 2013. During January 2014 a first draft was circulated to the committee for comments and revisions. The entire SAR was circulated to all academic, technical and administrative staff on 24th February. The final version of the SAR was submitted to the UCD Quality Office on 4th March 2014.

The University

- 1.10 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university, the origins of which date back to 1854. The University is situated on a large modern campus about 4 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.
- 1.11 The University Strategic Plan (to 2014) states that the University's mission is: "to advance knowledge, to pursue truth and to foster learning, in an atmosphere of discovery, creativity, innovation and excellence, drawing out the best in each student, and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland in the wider world".

The University is organised into 38 schools in seven colleges:

- UCD College of Arts and Celtic Studies
- UCD College of Human Sciences

- UCD College of Science
- UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
- UCD College of Health Sciences
- UCD College of Business and Law
- UCD College of Agriculture, Food Science and Veterinary Medicine

1.12 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture, Veterinary, Arts, Law, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 24,000 students in our UCD campus (approximately 15,500 undergraduates, 8,000 postgraduates and 2,000 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on over 70 University degree programmes, including over 6,100 international students from more than 121 countries. The University also has over 5,400 students studying UCD degree courses on campuses overseas.

UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science (SBES)

1.13 The UCD School of Biology & Environmental Science (SBES) is the largest teaching and research centre for biology in the Republic of Ireland. SBES was formed in 2005, by combining the former Science Faculty Departments of Botany, Zoology and some staff from Industrial Microbiology along with the Departments of Horticulture, Forestry, Applied Environmental Science and Rural Development from the Faculty of Agriculture in the newly formed College of Life Sciences. In 2010, following a further re-structuring exercise at UCD, the former Faculty of Agriculture moved to the newly formed UCD College of Agriculture, Food Science & Veterinary Medicine, and SBES remained as one of seven schools that comprise the newly formed UCD College of Science, located in the UCD Science Centre.

1.14 In addition to the structural changes in the 2005-2013 period, UCD engaged in a process of modularising its curriculum. This has provided the School with greater flexibility in terms of its teaching load, and has provided a mechanism by which several new taught MSc programmes could be developed. Currently the School has over 5,000 students registered to a range of modules delivered by SBES and most of the School's teaching is delivered into the Science Programme, with the School being responsible for four single major BSc degrees through a large and diverse suite of modules, seven degree programmes at Masters level and an active PhD programme. Staff from the School also participate in a number of thematic PhD programmes such as the Earth and Natural Sciences programme and the Computational and Systems Biology programme.

1.15 The School has a strong record of research and publishing across diverse areas of the biological sciences, encompassing the fields of cell and molecular biology, genetics, animal and plant physiology, evolutionary biology, environmental biology, ecological modelling,

plant biology, microbiology and zoology. The move of several research groups to new research facilities, for example the UCD Earth Institute (EI) in mid-2014 offers further opportunities for development.

2. Organisation and Management

Organisation of the School

- 2.1 Day-to-day management of the School is led by the Head of School, with a Deputy Head empowered to make decisions in the Head's absence.
- 2.2 The Head, Deputy Head, Head of Teaching & Learning, Head of Postgraduate Studies, and Head of Research & Innovation comprise the School Management Group. Reporting to the School Management Group is the School Executive (the role of which is to look at policy and advise the Head of School), and four committees: Teaching & Learning, Postgraduate Studies, Research & Innovation, and School Safety. The heads of three of the four committees – School Safety is the exception – work with designated members of the School's administrative staff. There are four subject areas within the School, each with its own Head, and they 'form the core' of the Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 2.3 There is a Staff-Student Liaison Committee for undergraduates, and a less formalised arrangement for three/four members of the postgraduate community to represent that group's concerns to staff. *Ad hoc* committees deal with issues as required. The SAR was produced by one such committee.
- 2.4 The School is located in the College of Science, which is led by the College Principal. SBES is represented on the College Executive by its Head of School. The Head of Teaching & Learning sits on the College's Undergraduate Programme Board, as do the School's four Heads of Subject. The Head of Postgraduate Studies sits on the College's Graduate School Board; the School is in the process of organising representation on the new College Taught Masters Programme Board. The Head of Research & Innovation sits on CRIB, the College Research and Innovation Board. The School's academic staff is poorly represented at College Council.
- 2.5 The small administrative team (3.5 FTEs - see also para. 3.1) supports 26.5 academic staff members, 14.5 technical staff, postdoctoral scholars and a student cohort of up to 600 students per year, a significant proportion of which (especially on taught Masters programmes) is non-Irish.
- 2.6 The School has two Chief Technical Officers, which is an inheritance of an earlier configuration of departments in UCD. They are line managers to a cohort of senior technical officers; that cohort has been shrinking in recent years, with ten staff having left or retired in less than a decade.

- 2.7 The Employment Control Framework (ECF) imposes serious constraints on the ability of SBES to conduct effective succession planning and strategic development of its HR profiles.

School meetings

- 2.8 Meetings of the School staff and of the formal committees are not scheduled regularly and there is no clearly defined policy in respect of attendees.
- 2.9 The School tends to rely on casual, informal meetings as fora for discussion and as contexts in which colleagues might plan collaborations; these informal meetings play a critical role in creating a group identity.

Communications

- 2.10 In the absence of a rota of different types of meeting of school staff, and therefore of the chain of communication which usually issues from such meetings, vertical and horizontal information flow across the School staff is informal, irregular, and generally inconsistent. The creation of a new email address for the Head of School is a step towards rectifying this, but it is a very significant problem in the School.
- 2.11 Information flow between staff and students is mainly at Subject rather than School level, and can be *ad hoc*.
- 2.12 The School web-site is underused as an interface between the School and the external world (potential graduate students, for example), and as a tool for disseminating information internally (e.g. grants, publications, and so on).
- 2.13 The student body uses, but is over-reliant on, its own social media networks for dissemination of information about School/Subject matters.

Workload

- 2.14 The School has a workload model that addresses the core areas of teaching, research and administration. This has resulted in a reasonably equitable distribution of duties across the academic staff.
- 2.15 Workload issues are less rigorously addressed with respect to the relatively small cohort of non-academic support staff. The dedication of those colleagues to the School is striking, but there is a pronounced work-life imbalance, and there are no compensatory promotional opportunities.

School Finances

- 2.16 The School is in deficit. The current deficit is 2.5 times that of 2011/12 due to a reduction in fee income and an increase in expenditure. The School is looking at ways to balance its

books, by increased numbers of overseas students and reducing electricity consumption, for example.

Commendations

- 2.17 The School has a very hard-working academic staff, committed to their subject areas and driven by a sense of duty to their students and to UCD's ethos. Increased research productivity, despite falling resources and infrastructural problems, testifies to that.
- 2.18 The Head of School, who enjoys the goodwill and respect of his colleagues at all levels, leads by example and is dedicated to quality-improvement.
- 2.19 The School's administrators and technical officers are very collegial and carry an enormous workload; their willingness to take on additional or un-prescribed roles as needed, and to extend their skill-base through courses, contributes hugely to the School's success.

Recommendations

Organisation

- 2.20 The Review Group recommends that the School rethinks the constitution and roles of the School Management Group and the School Executive, and the delegation of responsibility from its senior academic managers to the entire academic community. The School should endeavour to line up the nomenclature of its management units with that of the College, so that, for example, 'School Executive' becomes the local equivalent of 'College Executive'.
- 2.21 The Review Group recommends that the School Safety Committee be given that same representation as the three other committees in the School.
- 2.22 The Review Group recommends a strict adherence to the principle of fixed-term administrative roles within the School for academic staff members, and transparency in how those roles are allocated.
- 2.23 The Review Group recommends that the School reviews the efficacy of the current distribution of technical staff to research areas and makes adjustments as needed where practicable.
- 2.24 The Review Group recognises both the common ground and the areas of divergence between SBES and the School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Sciences (SBBS). It recommends strongly *to the College* that a working group be convened, in consultation with the College Principal, to consider structures through which natural synergies between the Schools and their constituent subject-areas might be marshalled more effectively.

School meetings

- 2.25 The Review Group recommends, *as a matter of urgency*, that the School create a calendar of meetings in tandem with the reorganisation of its structures; the burden of minute-taking on administrative staff should be recognised.

Communications

- 2.26 The Review Group recommends, *as a matter of urgency*, the establishment of principles and mechanisms of communication both vertically and horizontally within the School. It suggests that, for example, dedicated email addresses (such as that now possessed by the Head of School) are used to carry certain types of information so that important communications are not 'missed'.
- 2.27 The Review Group recommends that the School considers the value of social media as a means of communicating with its students.

Workload

- 2.28 The Review Group recognises the huge – unreasonable, even – burden carried by the School's non-academic support staff, and acknowledges how critical that staff's sense of duty is to the operation of the School. The Review Group also recognises, then, that the lack of cover leaves the School extremely exposed. The Review Group recommends that the School persists with requests to the UCD Budget Review Committee (BRG) and/or the College to expand its non-academic staff, and encourages the School to use this Report as supporting documentation of the need.

3. Staff and Facilities

- 3.1 SBES, part of the College of Life Sciences, was formed in 2005 by combining the former Faculty of Science Departments of Botany and Zoology, the former Faculty of Agriculture Departments of Horticulture, Forestry, Applied Environmental Science and Rural Development, and some staff from Industrial Microbiology. In 2010 the majority of staff from the former Faculty of Agriculture moved to the newly formed UCD College of Agriculture, Food Science & Veterinary Medicine. The current number of full-time staff in SBES is relatively small: 26.5 academics, 14.5 technical officers and 3.5 administrators.
- 3.2 This academic staff cohort represents a significant decline since 2005 (when it comprised 51 academic staff), compounded by a loss of 10 technical staff in the last decade. A School Manager has been on leave of absence since 2010 and will retire in 2014. A further 4, and then 7, staff are projected to retire within the next 5 and 10 years, respectively. One new administrative post is likely to be appointed in early 2014, both to support the Head of School and to carry out other administrative tasks.

- 3.3 Technical staff support teaching and, where possible, research. They show enthusiasm for learning new techniques and developing their skills portfolio.
- 3.4 Laboratory facilities for teaching and research have a bright future, with the construction of the new Science Building (Science East and Earth Institute), though the older facilities in Science West are showing their age, being rather cramped and in need of refurbishment. There is a good amount of reading space for postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff, though some postgraduate students commented on variable standards of quality of the working environment (e.g. temperature control).
- 3.5 A major concern to emerge in the review was the lack of communal space which the Review Group agreed was essential to promote information flow amongst all members of SBES, through informal discussions. The original tearoom had been sacrificed to provide reading space for postgraduate students. While Science East has large communal areas outside rooms, these are not especially conducive to the kind of informal discussion that will improve business networking among SBES members, as they are effectively walkways used by undergraduate students.
- 3.6 All staff work to full capacity, and workloads are likely to become more intense given the pressures to recruit more postgraduate students, to generate more research grant income, and to publish more high-quality papers. The lack of promotion opportunities for academic and administrative staff has adversely affected staff morale. There is evidence that administrative staff members have suffered from stress as a consequence, and at least one has had to take sick-leave for a protracted period. One senior member of technical staff may retire in the short-, rather than medium-term, raising significant concerns about delivery of teaching and provision of research support, and of longer term succession planning.
- 3.7 Some concern was expressed in the SAR about the future dislocation and loss of coherence of SBES through relocation of some staff to the Earth Institute. Given the current relatively low critical mass of SBES staff by international standards, these changes may only exacerbate the problem. On the other hand, the establishment of an internationally recognised multidisciplinary Earth Institute is likely to have the effect of raising the international scientific standing of UCD, and could attract new high-flying staff (subject to government constraints on employment).
- 3.8 There was some concern that the systems for the induction and mentoring of new staff in the School needed an overhaul.
- 3.9 Postdoctoral scientists contribute to the supervision of postgraduate students, but feel these contributions are not always formally recognised. They also feel that they have inadequate induction (they do not feel they know many other staff, or know all necessary safety procedures), and have no voice in SBES, such as through representation on the Research Committee. However, one representative of this group had recently been invited to join the Safety Committee.

Commendations

- 3.10 The Review Group was impressed by the dedication, purposeful effort and collegiality of staff at all levels in the face of severe financial pressures on research, teaching, appointments, and promotions. New staff specifically commented on the friendliness of their colleagues. Academic staff were also highly appreciative of the support that they receive from academic colleagues and research staff/students for both teaching/learning and research activities.
- 3.11 The new Science East building provides an inspirational environment for research and teaching.
- 3.12 High quality research platform facilities are available around the UCD campus, and can be accessed by SBES staff to underpin their science programmes.
- 3.13 Postdoctoral staff makes an excellent contribution to undergraduate and postgraduate supervision, and provide vital support for the academic staff.

Recommendations

- 3.14 Relocation of SBES staff to Science East and the Earth Institute should be managed carefully to avoid excessive loss of integrity and identity of SBES.
- 3.15 Space should be identified for a tearoom facility to promote informal communication of news and ideas amongst School members. This would also facilitate the introduction of more social events to promote staff interactions.
- 3.16 Formal procedures should be instigated for staff induction and mentoring (including postdoctoral research staff).
- 3.17 Succession planning for senior technical staff should be initiated.
- 3.18 A representative of the postdoctoral research staff should be invited to join the School Research Committee, and post-docs might also be supported in establishing a 'Post-doc Forum' for discussion of issues relevant to them, perhaps mediated by a younger member of academic staff who would provide a conduit to SBES management (e.g. at regular staff meetings).
- 3.19 Some form of informal accreditation by SBES of the supervisory/teaching roles of postdoctoral staff is recommended, to support their career development.

4. Teaching, Learning & Assessment

- 4.1 The SBES offers a broad teaching programme, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The 69 undergraduate modules offered across 5 degree programmes cover broad taxonomic, conceptual and organisational areas of biology, spanning the biological scale from molecules to ecosystems. The School also delivers 52 taught postgraduate (PGT) 'modules' across 8 PGT degree programmes that are focused on topics relevant to the markets from which the school recruits a growing community.
- 4.2 The undergraduate programmes are delivered by a committed and dedicated staff. The Review Group was impressed by the focus on delivering high-quality teaching. The students' perception of the provision they receive maps closely onto what the staff believes it is delivering.
- 4.3 The SBES students that the Review Group talked to, and the feedback data provided strongly suggest SBES undergraduates receive outstanding teaching provision that is delivered in a supportive environment.
- 4.4 The SAR identified several key issues with the SBES teaching provision at undergraduate stage 1 (e.g. core skills and 'branding'). Conversations with undergraduate representatives confirmed these weaknesses and identified a new component of the 'branding' process that the Teaching & Learning Committee needs to consider (see recommendation 5.6 below).
- 4.5 The SAR identified pathway constraints for stage 2 SBES undergraduates that arose from a number of issues related to stage 1 module design as well as the re-alignment of the genetics programme since the re-structuring of the College of Science.

Commendations

- 4.6 The SBES undergraduates who represented SBES at the Review Group meeting were excellent ambassadors for the School and a strong symbol of the quality of the SBES learning experience. The Review Group felt that the reputation enjoyed by SBES for looking after its undergraduate students was well deserved.
- 4.7 The PGT students were equally impressive and SBES is to be commended on recruiting high quality graduates to its Masters programmes. The students enjoy a challenging and demanding learning experience.
- 4.8 All students (undergraduate, PGT and PG Research) identified closely with the Principal Investigator (PI) groups in which they were embedded. At undergraduate and PGT levels this is a strong signal that the SBES is delivering authentic research-led teaching.
- 4.9 Despite the severe constraints imposed by the ECF, the Review Group was very impressed by the strong collegiality, good citizenship and "cohesion of purpose" displayed by all the

SBES staff who deliver and support teaching in the School. This needs to be nurtured and built upon in the face of the challenges identified through this review process.

Recommendations

- 4.10 SBES's policy to grow its overseas PGT numbers is at a sensitive stage but has real momentum. The Review Group feels that any College or University resources for the improvement of delivery and support of teaching provision should be prioritised for administrative support for PGT programmes – this is an urgent requirement in SBES.
- 4.11 The Review Group recommends that SBES develops an Action Plan arising from the SWOT analysis of undergraduate programmes contained in the SAR (Appendix 4.10). Although the identified weaknesses are rather broad, the Review Group acknowledges the SBES has a clear view of the strategic relevance of these weaknesses.
- 4.12 SBES undergraduate and PGT students have a strong sense of engagement with their courses, but are less linked within and across their peer-groups. The undergraduates have resolved this issue by using social media to discuss course and programme issues. However, the PGTs are more isolated, probably because of the short time-frame of the course, their smaller cohort, and their cultural 'distance' from the UCD system. The Review Group recommends that PGT students are explicitly captured in the SBES's new communications strategy.
- 4.13 There is scope to improve the connectivity within SBES's PhD community as well as the way Doctoral Studies Panels (DSPs) interact with PhD students. The current system requires individually timetabled meetings where the student is reviewed *via* an oral presentation. If these presentations were delivered in timetabled symposia that were immediately followed by DSP meetings there would be better temporal organisation of DSPs. The PhD community would therefore have better oversight of degree trajectories and expectations and of SBES's research breadth and approaches. As with other recommendations in this document, a defined School social space would amplify the desired outcomes (see also 3.15).

5. Curriculum Development and Review

- 5.1 SBES, through its Teaching & Learning Committee, is alert to the need for on-going review of its curriculum.
- 5.2 Feedback from undergraduate students indicated that there is considerable overlap between what was covered by the Leaving Certificate Biology course and a substantial proportion of the teaching in First Year. The students felt that the teaching was of excellent quality, but that a considerable proportion of it was a repeat of the Leaving Certificate course and that it was not, therefore, as attractive or as stimulating as modules offered elsewhere.

- 5.3 A requirement was highlighted for statistics/research methodology to be taught earlier in the undergraduate course so that students are fully prepared for experimental design and statistical analysis in their fourth year projects.
- 5.4 As recognised and discussed in the SAR, the School currently faces two immediate challenges to its ability to deliver its current curriculum and, by extension, to any ambition to expand that curriculum:
- the move from outdated laboratory infrastructure in Science West into state-of-the-art facilities in Science East
 - the creation of the Earth Institute
- 5.5 With staff already working to capacity, the School's ability to develop its curriculum through strategic appointments is compromised by the Employment Control Framework (ECF).

Commendations

- 5.6 The Teaching & Learning Committee is actively developing strategic plans to enhance the delivery of undergraduate provision and widen the scope of PGT recruitment. That committee is sensitive to the value of having a diverse community of learners.
- 5.7 The SAR presents an objective and self-critical overview of the strengths and weaknesses of SBES's teaching and learning provision, which is the starting-point for any consideration of how its curriculum can be developed. The Review Group commends the School on its very positive outlook, its analytical approach, and its recognition that it needs to take a clear strategic approach. This is particularly impressive given the resource landscape.

Recommendation

- 5.8 The SWOT analysis (SAR Appendix 4.10) did not explicitly identify the perceptions of Science undergraduate that (i) stage 1 SBES module content overlaps with Leaving Certificate material and (ii) that statistics/research methodology should be introduced much earlier in the curriculum. The School's review of its course content should therefore also (a) ensure revised stage 1 SBES modules deliver new material that is more challenging and engaging, and (b) ensure the delivery of statistical training so it is embedded in the core of the curriculum rather than as a "bolt-on" for project work at the end of the degree.
- 5.9 An assessment should be made of the overlap between the Leaving Certificate Biology course and what is taught in First Year. This may help the School to develop further modules that appeal to the modern science student.

6. Research Activity

- 6.1 Research activity in SBES is broad-ranging, from molecular cell biology to climate change and evolutionary biology. It involves the study of a wide range of organisms, and this is supported by some excellent facilities, both on Campus and at the UCD Rosemount Environmental Research Station.
- 6.2 Almost all (87%) academic staff are considered research active, as defined by UCD criteria.
- 6.3 The external research grant income, numbers of postgraduate students, and in particular number and quality of research publications is strong, and in fact impressive given the backdrop of weak research funding in Ireland.
- 6.4 There is a regular seminar programme with international speakers, and postgraduate and postdoctoral staff, as well as PIs, attend. This is considered to be important means of networking and learning from world-class research in other institutions.
- 6.5 The SBES Research Committee has a role in defining the principal research strengths in the School (which have been formalised as the four Research Themes), and aims to support these through communication of research funding opportunities, both national and international, and the management of small amounts of Seed Funding. The Research Committee also has the opportunity to identify gaps in research skills; one possible gap discussed is in informatics, which is an area of Science that underpins most of the research in SBES.
- 6.6 While there is an overarching research strategy in place, there is no 'Impact Strategy' in SBES. The Impact Agenda is of increasing significance elsewhere in Europe (and beyond), and is important to address if members of SBES wish to continue to secure EU funding.
- 6.7 Technical staff members appear willing to develop their skill base, and this represents an important resource to maintain competitive research activity in a difficult funding environment. Some academic staff commented on the uneven distribution of technical support across research groups.
- 6.8 SBES does not hold 'Research Away-days', which can provide a useful means to discuss and disseminate strategic plans for research and impact amongst SBES staff, and to provide opportunities to highlight and celebrate recent achievements.
- 6.9 Staff commented on a variable quality of post-award grant support from the UCD Research Finance Office.
- 6.10 Postdoctoral staff and postgraduate students commented that there is no accessible equipment register, and were not fully aware of what facilities are available to support their research, either within SBES or elsewhere on the UCD campus.

- 6.11 The School website represents an important opportunity to promote the research excellence that exists in SBES, to highlight newsworthy events and achievements, and to attract undergraduate and postgraduate students. It is important to keep this up-to-date, but clearly this requires resources.
- 6.12 Postgraduate students feel they have few opportunities to discuss their research through presentations to a broad audience. They furthermore feel that the DSP system is not functioning efficiently, and can be rather uneven in terms of quality of feedback. However, some feel it has improved in recent months. One issue mentioned was the difficulty of raising supervision problems with staff who, inevitably, are colleagues of the supervisor.
- 6.13 Relatively few staff take advantage of the sabbatical system, due to difficulties in finding/funding replacement teaching. Colleagues help out where this is feasible, but there are clear difficulties. Sabbaticals provide important opportunities to plan and write new grant application and papers, and develop new research collaborations.
- 6.14 A limited proportion of the overhead on successful research grants goes back into the School, and funding from this source could provide both a valuable incentive to staff to submit grant applications, and opportunities for conference attendance or investment in new research programmes (e.g. multidisciplinary science).

Commendations

- 6.15 The Review Group commends the high quality of research outputs and training carried out by SBES staff, supported by dedicated technical staff. A significant number of publications are in the best peer-reviewed journals (*Science, Nature, PNAS, Current Biology*), and the total number of outputs has increased dramatically in the last 5 years.
- 6.16 The new Science East building provides impressive new facilities for research.
- 6.17 Postgraduate students are well trained for roles as demonstrators, providing them with expertise that will assist them in the development of their future careers.
- 6.18 There is a strong seminar programme that brings in international speakers.

Recommendations

- 6.19 SBES Research Committee should develop its research strategy on a rolling basis, identifying new areas of science for future investment (including *Horizon 2020* opportunities) and new infrastructure requirements, and it should establish an Impact Strategy for the School.
- 6.20 A clear programme of skills-development for technical staff should be put in place, to support both research and teaching initiatives and to ensure currency. School management might wish to consider rotation of technical support staff between research groups.

- 6.21 SBES should consider holding ‘Research Away-days’, to promote research planning, information dissemination and celebration of scientific highlights.
- 6.22 The University should examine whether the UCD Research Office and the UCD Research Finance Office are adequately resourced to support research activity, especially in the face of likely numerous applications to *Horizon 2020* programmes.
- 6.23 The School could develop a more strategic vision and policy around broadening research collaboration, strengthening internal and external networks and ensuring that these are consistent with the strategic research vision of the wider University. Given some common interests and research application of underpinning technology with SBBS, the Review Group suggests that there is value in discussing how best to maximise collaboration and share research support between the two Schools.
- 6.24 The College of Science might establish a cross-School register of equipment and facilities, and make this available to staff and research students, e.g. on the UCD intranet, to promote information flow and new research collaborations.
- 6.25 The School should review regularly its research web page to ensure that it highlights the breadth and depth of the School’s research endeavours, along with its links with other schools and colleges in and beyond UCD.
- 6.26 The School should review its DSP system, and provide more opportunities for postgraduate students to present their work to a broad audience (e.g. through a Postgraduate Research Day, or Postgraduate Seminar Series). The postgraduate students might like to play a major role in organising this.
- 6.27 The School should explore models to free up staff for more research activity. This could include a review of the School’s sabbatical system, through provision of funding or managing teaching timetables (e.g. restricting to semester for that year). This should be considered in line with the School’s workload policy.
- 6.28 The University might review its policy on placing a higher proportion of grant overheads back into the School.

7. Management of Quality and Enhancement

- 7.1 The School effectively use a broad variety of approaches to evaluate the quality of the outputs of the School including, *inter alia*, student feedback, data on student progression and results, External Examiner reports, strategic planning and research planning exercises. School staff are justifiably very proud of the quality of their teaching and research endeavours.

- 7.2 The points that students need to achieve in their Leaving Certificate examination to gain entry into Science at UCD has increased substantially over the past number of years. This is partially as a result of the increase in points allocated to Honours Mathematics and partially due to the increased demand for the course. As a result, the quality of the undergraduate students taken into the School is very good.
- 7.3 Undergraduates felt that School staff are extremely accessible and reported that most staff have an open door policy. They are happy that communication via Blackboard is good. Undergraduate students also use a *Facebook* group to communicate with each other.
- 7.4 However, there are currently no class representatives in the taught MSc programmes and no forum for the students from the different programmes to meet or interact. This is the only group of students that do not feel that the academic staff are very accessible. Class representatives required for taught masters groups and students on different courses need a structure to meet and communicate with each other.
- 7.5 Undergraduate modules are evaluated using UCD's on-line module enhancement process and the Head of School also meets with the student representatives to verbally obtain feedback on the course. The students like these approaches, though the response to the on-line feedback is low. Student feedback on undergraduate programmes is positive and pass rates are good across modules.
- 7.6 While it is positive that the School regularly gathers feedback from students via the School's student representatives, there is scope to improve this communication, for example, there was evidence of a significant disconnect between the staff and student perception of the curriculum content, particularly in First Year (see also section 5). What some staff considered as "absolutely essential" was considered a "repeat of the Leaving Certificate course" by the students. A formalised Staff:Student Committee, possibly supplemented by annual focus groups with a wider cohort of students, might ensure that such disconnects are addressed.
- 7.7 As is common with all courses across UCD, students are not provided with feedback on their comments. This is a University-wide problem which should be addressed.
- 7.8 Feedback from Extern Examiners is positive and confirms the implementation of recommendations made in previous Extern Examiner Reports.
- 7.9 The varying levels of background expertise and training of the teaching assistants may be problematic for the School in maintaining quality of delivery of tutorials and practicals across the portfolio of modules. A plan needs to be developed for the future training of teaching assistants to match the teaching requirements.
- 7.10 The School's strategy to focus its complement of research active staff in areas of strategic national interest is an effective approach to ensure its sustained research excellence,

building capacity in key research areas while supporting the School's teaching mission at undergraduate and taught graduate levels in a robust way.

- 7.11 Quality management in research is an implicit function of a research-intensive school. Research publications from the School target the leading international journals and conferences, where they undergo detailed peer review. Research proposals are also subject to detailed peer review and, most notably in the case of major SFI grants, panels of international experts visit the research group to assess delivery midway through the grant.
- 7.12 Academic staff of the School contribute to quality review processes nationally and internationally through reviewing and editing activities for journals and conferences; reviewing research proposals, research programmes and research agencies; and serving on accreditation, quality review, interview and promotions panels (see 9.1 below). This work contributes to the dissemination of best practice into and out of the School, and provides a further mechanism for quality benchmarking.
- 7.13 The School has a large postgraduate community. The external stakeholder group were very positive about the quality of the PhD students that graduate from this School and regularly hire PhD graduates of the School (see 9.2 below).

Commendations

- 7.14 Formal and informal feedback from students is collected in a systematic way. Student feedback on the School is excellent.
- 7.15 Feedback from Extern Examiners is considered and appropriate actions taken by the School to address any concerns. Extern Examiner feedback on the School is very positive.
- 7.16 Feedback from external stakeholders on the quality of School graduates is notable.
- 7.17 The Review Group commends the School on its strategy to focus its complement of research active staff in areas of strategic national interest.
- 7.18 The engagement of School academic staff in quality activities external to the School is to be commended.

Recommendations

- 7.19 The School should explore ways to improve the response rate to their online module feedback surveys, perhaps, seeking input from UCD Teaching & Learning and the UCD Director of Institutional Research.
- 7.20 The School should review the role and composition of the staff-student liaison forum and other mechanisms established for the representation of student views and the prompt identification of student concerns across all programmes, including the taught masters

programmes. Consideration should be given to supplementing such activities with annual focus groups with a wide cohort of student participants.

- 7.21 The School should establish a forum where students on different courses can meet and communicate with each other.
- 7.22 The School should consider ways to close the 'feedback loop' to students by updating them in outcomes arising from student feedback. The School should engage with UCD Teaching & Learning and the UCD Director of Institutional Research to explore ways that feedback to students could be provided.
- 7.23 The School should liaise with UCD Teaching and Learning to develop a plan for the future training of teaching assistants to match the School's teaching requirements.
- 7.24 The School should continue to engage in its approach to School research planning.
- 7.25 The School should be supported by the University to hire new academic staff to strategically important and high impact research areas.

8. Support Services

- 8.1 The School operates well within the wider College and University structures and recognises that it obtains support services from a number of different sources including services provided within SBES, services provided within the College of Science and services provided by the broader UCD landscape.
- 8.2 The School performed a survey to identify the support services that it availed of and to establish its level of satisfaction with the services that were available. There was an excellent response of the School staff to this survey.
- 8.3 The varying level of satisfaction of the staff to the support services was predominantly due to recent financial cutbacks to some of the support services, which have had a discernible negative effect on their effectiveness, and was also due in part to a lack of knowledge on the part of the staff of the services that are actually available.
- 8.4 There was varying levels of satisfaction with the quality of support services provided to the school by UCD, and there are a number of areas where the School feels it would be better able to perform its duties if there were better support services available. These include:

Human Resources: staff clearly feel that there are significant delays in hiring staff/postgraduates to projects and ensuring the timely first payments. This places substantial strain on the new recruits. Some staff were also were not aware that the School has a HR Partner.

Research support: Staff feel that there is a lot of excellent information available on the UCD website on how to write grants but there is little actual support. This is particularly important for writing the impact statements and developing the financial components of grant applications. Staff also acknowledge that they are not accountants and that the accounts required can often be overly complicated. They also feel that there are delays in getting financial reports for grant updates.

IT, Library, Bursars Office, Buildings and Services, Safety Office: There were very variable responses to enquiry as to the support that the School gets from a wide variety of other units within the University, which suggests that there is a lack of awareness among the staff of the range of resources and facilities available within UCD.

Commendations

- 8.5 The School benefits from an excellent, dedicated administrative team. During the site visit administrative staff were praised by both academic colleagues and students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Indeed, administrative staff show an impressive level of dedication to the School, with several members currently stretched to full capacity. This is to be commended particularly in the current circumstances where pay cuts have been introduced at a national level for public sector employees.
- 8.6 The School has a dynamic and enthusiastic technical support team. This team is led by two chief technical support officers who allocate teaching and research duties to the other members of the team and who support the career development on the younger members of the team. This group has developed a very supportive 'buddy' working arrangement. The attitude of this team is to be applauded, particularly in the current circumstances where pay cuts have been introduced and there are currently no plans for promotion of technical staff within UCD.

Recommendations

- 8.7 Appropriate induction programmes need to be established to adequately inform both new and established members of the School of the supports and services that are available. Engagement should be mandatory and recorded appropriately.
- 8.8 An assessment of administrative support needs to be performed within the School and within support units of the University to highlight where support systems are failing due to lack of personnel. External to the School, UCD HR, UCD Research and UCD Finance were highlighted. The outcomes of this assessment the needs to be raised at School, College and University level.
- 8.9 The distribution of technical support requires discussion at School level. There were discrepancies between the opinions of the academic staff and the technical staff as to how technical staff are allocated, and to the fairness of this procedure.

- 8.10 The HR Partner should attend a sufficient number of School meetings to become known and be more accessible to all staff. The role of the HR Partner needs to be understood by all members of staff.
- 8.11 As part of School meetings, representatives of the UCD wide services could be invited to provide short informative updates on supports available to the School.
- 8.12 The University should implement a round of internal promotion for technical and administrative staff *as a matter of urgency*.
- 8.13 A succession plan for technical staff needs to be established and the School should be supported in replacing retiring technical staff.
- 8.14 An official system should be developed to record the support that the postdoctoral fellows and PhD students provide to the training of undergraduates, MSc students and other PhD students.

9. External Relations

- 9.1 Staff in the School carry out a wide range of activities that promote UCD and SBES externally, including serving on the boards of scientific societies and journals, external examiners, and acting as grant reviewers and assessors for national and international research funding agencies.
- 9.2 Employers met by the Review Group were very positive about graduates from SBES and UCD more generally, and emphasised the value to them of the high quality training in basic science.
- 9.3 Some members of the School have links with industry (and attract industrial funding), but this is a small number.
- 9.4 The current Head of School is putting a large amount of effort, successfully, into the internationalisation agenda for both SBES and UCD.

Commendations

- 9.5 Members of academic staff have a good record of serving as external examiners, referees, assessors, and editors of journals across wide range of universities.
- 9.6 Some members of SBES staff have strong media profiles.
- 9.7 Some members of the School contribute to important national bodies such as The Royal Irish Academy and Teagasc.

- 9.8 Members of the School organise national and international conferences.
- 9.9 Employers were very positive about the scientific quality and relevance of SBES graduates.
- 9.10 The internationalisation effort is bearing fruit in terms of overseas postgraduate student applications and raising the profile of SBES research and teaching.

Recommendations

- 9.11 The School should develop a strategy for securing EU funds by following closely the calls for *Horizon 2020*.
- 9.12 While it will not be appropriate for all SBES staff (because of the nature of their work), a strategy should be developed to increase engagement with stakeholders (industry, environmental agencies etc.), which should lead to increased impact of SBES research, increased project funding and increased opportunities for graduate employment.
- 9.13 The School might explore how it can make better linkages with its alumni. The College should explore the potential establishment of College-wide alumni relationships, with a role in tracking graduates.

10. Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

A. Organisation and Management

Commendations

- A.1 The School has a very hard-working academic staff, committed to their subject areas and driven by a sense of duty to their students and to UCD's ethos. Increased research productivity, despite falling resources and infrastructural problems, testifies to that.
- A.2 The Head of School, who enjoys the goodwill and respect of his colleagues at all levels, leads by example and is dedicated to quality-improvement.
- A.3 The School's administrators and technical officers are very collegial and carry an enormous workload; their willingness to take on additional or un-prescribed roles as needed, and to extend their skill-base through courses, contributes hugely to the School's success.

Recommendations

Organisation

- A.4 The Review Group recommends that the School rethinks the constitution and roles of the School Management Group and the School Executive, and the delegation of responsibility

from its senior academic managers to the entire academic community. The School should endeavour to line up the nomenclature of its management units with that of the College, so that, for example, 'School Executive' becomes the local equivalent of 'College Executive'.

- A.5 The Review Group recommends that the School Safety Committee be given that same representation as the three other committees in the School.
- A.6 The Review Group recommends a strict adherence to the principle of fixed-term administrative roles within the School for academic staff members, and transparency in how those roles are allocated.
- A.7 The Review Group recommends that the School reviews the efficacy of the current distribution of technical staff to research areas and makes adjustments as needed where practicable.
- A.8 The Review Group recognises both the common ground and the areas of divergence between SBES and the School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Sciences (SBBS). It recommends strongly *to the College* that a working group be convened, in consultation with the College Principal, to consider structures through which natural synergies between the Schools and their constituent subject-areas might be marshalled more effectively.

School meetings

- A.9 The Review Group recommends, *as a matter of urgency*, that the School create a calendar of meetings in tandem with the reorganisation of its structures; the burden of minute-taking on administrative staff should be recognised.

Communications

- A.10 The Review Group recommends, *as a matter of urgency*, the establishment of principles and mechanisms of communication both vertically and horizontally within the School. It suggests that, for example, dedicated email addresses (such as that now possessed by the Head of School) are used to carry certain types of information so that important communications are not 'missed'.
- A.11 The Review Group recommends that the School considers the value of social media as a means of communicating with its students.

Workload

- A.12 The Review Group recognises the huge – unreasonable, even – burden carried by the School's non-academic support staff, and acknowledges how critical that staff's sense of duty is to the operation of the School. The Review Group also recognises, then, that the lack of cover leaves the School extremely exposed. The Review Group recommends that

the School persists with requests to the UCD Budget Review Committee (BRG) and/or the College to expand its non-academic staff, and encourages the School to use this Report as supporting documentation of the need.

B. Staff and Facilities

Commendations

- B.1 The Review Group was impressed by the dedication, purposeful effort and collegiality of staff at all levels in the face of severe financial pressures on research, teaching, appointments, and promotions. New staff specifically commented on the friendliness of their colleagues. Academic staff were also highly appreciative of the support that they receive from academic colleagues and research staff/students for both teaching/learning and research activities.
- B.2 The new Science East building provides an inspirational environment for research and teaching.
- B.3 High quality research platform facilities are available around the UCD campus, and can be accessed by SBES staff to underpin their science programmes.
- B.4 Postdoctoral staff makes an excellent contribution to undergraduate and postgraduate supervision, and provide vital support for the academic staff.

Recommendations

- B.5 Relocation of SBES staff to Science East and the Earth Institute should be managed carefully to avoid excessive loss of integrity and identity of SBES.
- B.6 Space should be identified for a tearoom facility to promote informal communication of news and ideas amongst School members. This would also facilitate the introduction of more social events to promote staff interactions.
- B.7 Formal procedures should be instigated for staff induction and mentoring (including postdoctoral research staff).
- B.8 Succession planning for senior technical staff should be initiated.
- B.9 A representative of the postdoctoral research staff should be invited to join the School Research Committee, and post-docs might also be supported in establishing a 'Post-doc Forum' for discussion of issues relevant to them, perhaps mediated by a younger member of academic staff who would provide a conduit to SBES management (e.g. at regular staff meetings).

- B.10 Some form of informal accreditation by SBES of the supervisory/teaching roles of postdoctoral staff is recommended, to support their career development.

C. Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Commendations

- C.1 The SBES undergraduates who represented SBES at the Review Group meeting were excellent ambassadors for the School and a strong symbol of the quality of the SBES learning experience. The Review Group felt that the reputation enjoyed by SBES for looking after its undergraduate students was well deserved.
- C.2 The PGT students were equally impressive and SBES is to be commended on recruiting high quality graduates to its Masters programmes. The students enjoy a challenging and demanding learning experience.
- C.3 All students (undergraduate, PGT and PG Research) identified closely with the Principal Investigator (PI) groups in which they were embedded. At undergraduate and PGT levels this is a strong signal that the SBES is delivering authentic research-led teaching.
- C.4 Despite the severe constraints imposed by the ECF, the Review Group was very impressed by the strong collegiality, good citizenship and “cohesion of purpose” displayed by all the SBES staff who deliver and support teaching in the School. This needs to be nurtured and built upon in the face of the challenges identified through this review process.

Recommendations

- C.5 SBES’s policy to grow its overseas PGT numbers is at a sensitive stage but has real momentum. The Review Group feels that any College or University resources for the improvement of delivery and support of teaching provision should be prioritised for administrative support for PGT programmes – this is an urgent requirement in SBES.
- C.6 The Review Group recommends that SBES develops an Action Plan arising from the SWOT analysis of undergraduate programmes contained in the SAR (Appendix 4.10). Although the identified weaknesses are rather broad, the Review Group acknowledges the SBES has a clear view of the strategic relevance of these weaknesses.
- C.7 SBES undergraduate and PGT students have a strong sense of engagement with their courses, but are less linked within and across their peer-groups. The undergraduates have resolved this issue by using social media to discuss course and programme issues. However, the PGTs are more isolated, probably because of the short time-frame of the course, their smaller cohort, and their cultural ‘distance’ from the UCD system. The Review Group recommends that PGT students are explicitly captured in the SBES’s new communications strategy.

- C.8 There is scope to improve the connectivity within SBES's PhD community as well as the way Doctoral Studies Panels (DSPs) interact with PhD students. The current system requires individually timetabled meetings where the student is reviewed *via* an oral presentation. If these presentations were delivered in timetabled symposia that were immediately followed by DSP meetings there would be better temporal organisation of DSPs. The PhD community would therefore have better oversight of degree trajectories and expectations and of SBES's research breadth and approaches. As with other recommendations in this document, a defined School social space would amplify the desired outcomes (see also 3.15).

D. Curriculum Development and Review

Commendations

- D.1 The Teaching & Learning Committee is actively developing strategic plans to enhance the delivery of undergraduate provision and widen the scope of PGT recruitment. That committee is sensitive to the value of having a diverse community of learners.
- D.2 The SAR presents an objective and self-critical overview of the strengths and weaknesses of SBES's teaching and learning provision, which is the starting-point for any consideration of how its curriculum can be developed. The Review Group commends the School on its very positive outlook, its analytical approach, and its recognition that it needs to take a clear strategic approach. This is particularly impressive given the resource landscape.

Recommendation

- D.3 The SWOT analysis (SAR Appendix 4.10) did not explicitly identify the perceptions of Science undergraduate that (i) stage 1 SBES module content overlaps with Leaving Certificate material and (ii) that statistics/research methodology should be introduced much earlier in the curriculum. The School's review of its course content should therefore also (a) ensure revised stage 1 SBES modules deliver new material that is more challenging and engaging, and (b) ensure the delivery of statistical training so it is embedded in the core of the curriculum rather than as a "bolt-on" for project work at the end of the degree.
- D.4 An assessment should be made of the overlap between the Leaving Certificate Biology course and what is taught in First Year. This may help the School to develop further modules that appeal to the modern science student.

E. Research Activity

Commendations

- E.1 The Review Group commends the high quality of research outputs and training carried out by SBES staff, supported by dedicated technical staff. A significant number of publications

are in the best peer-reviewed journals (*Science, Nature, PNAS, Current Biology*), and the total number of outputs has increased dramatically in the last 5 years.

- E.2 The new Science East building provides impressive new facilities for research.
- E.3 Postgraduate students are well trained for roles as demonstrators, providing them with expertise that will assist them in the development of their future careers.
- E.4 There is a strong seminar programme that brings in international speakers.

Recommendations

- E.5 SBES Research Committee should develop its research strategy on a rolling basis, identifying new areas of science for future investment (including *Horizon 2020* opportunities) and new infrastructure requirements, and it should establish an Impact Strategy for the School.
- E.6 A clear programme of skills-development for technical staff should be put in place, to support both research and teaching initiatives and to ensure currency. School management might wish to consider rotation of technical support staff between research groups.
- E.7 SBES should consider holding 'Research Away-days', to promote research planning, information dissemination and celebration of scientific highlights.
- E.8 The University should examine whether the UCD Research Office and the UCD Research Finance Office are adequately resourced to support research activity, especially in the face of likely numerous applications to *Horizon 2020* programmes.
- E.9 The School could develop a more strategic vision and policy around broadening research collaboration, strengthening internal and external networks and ensuring that these are consistent with the strategic research vision of the wider University. Given some common interests and research application of underpinning technology with SBBS, the Review Group suggests that there is value in discussing how best to maximise collaboration and share research support between the two Schools.
- E.10 The College of Science might establish a cross-School register of equipment and facilities, and make this available to staff and research students, e.g. on the UCD intranet, to promote information flow and new research collaborations.
- E.11 The School should review regularly its research web page to ensure that it highlights the breadth and depth of the School's research endeavours, along with its links with other schools and colleges in and beyond UCD.
- E.12 The School should review its DSP system, and provide more opportunities for postgraduate students to present their work to a broad audience (e.g. through a Postgraduate Research

Day, or Postgraduate Seminar Series). The postgraduate students might like to play a major role in organising this.

- E.13 The School should explore models to free up staff for more research activity. This could include a review of the School's sabbatical system, through provision of funding or managing teaching timetables (e.g. restricting to semester for that year). This should be considered in line with the School's workload policy.
- E.14 The University might review its policy on placing a higher proportion of grant overheads back into the School.

F. Management of Quality and Enhancement

Commendations

- F.1 Formal and informal feedback from students is collected in a systematic way. Student feedback on the School is excellent.
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G. Support Services

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- G.2 The School has a dynamic and enthusiastic technical support team. This team is led by two chief technical support officers who allocate teaching and research duties to the other members of the team and who support the career development on the younger members of the team. This group has developed a very supportive 'buddy' working arrangement. The attitude of this team is to be applauded, particularly in the current circumstances where pay cuts have been introduced and there are currently no plans for promotion of technical staff within UCD.

Recommendations

- G.3 Appropriate induction programmes need to be established to adequately inform both new and established members of the School of the supports and services that are available. Engagement should be mandatory and recorded appropriately.
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- G.6 The HR Partner should attend a sufficient number of School meetings to become known and be more accessible to all staff. The role of the HR Partner needs to be understood by all members of staff.
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APPENDIX 1

UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science Response to the Review Group Report

The UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science found the Internal Quality Review to be a highly useful and constructive process. We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Review Group, the manner in which the site visit was carried out, and we welcome the final Quality Review Report. Preparation of the Self-assessment Report allowed us to identify areas of good practice and aspects of School activities requiring attention, and we feel that it is a document that is a true reflection of the School at this time.

The School welcomes the Review Group's endorsement of our delivery of high-quality teaching and that it rightly praised our committed and positive staff. In particular the School is pleased that both the technical and administrative staff groups were highlighted as playing a key role in our success.

We have formulated a plan to address the recommendations in the Quality Review Report, and many actions are already underway. These include addressing the issues identified with communication of information across the School, the need to revise the content of some of our Stage 1 modules, and ensuring training in core scientific skills across all stages of our degrees. We sincerely believe that these changes will significantly benefit the School and its outputs. The School will also now use the Quality Review Report to inform our next Strategic Plan, which is now under development, and therefore we consider that this has been a very timely and important exercise.

APPENDIX 2



Review Visit Timetable

School of Biology & Environmental Science – 31 March to 3rd April 2014

Monday, 31 March 2014 - Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit

- 17.00-18.45 RG met in the Hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the site visit – **RG and UCD Quality Office only**
- 19.30 Dinner hosted for the RG by the UCD Registrar and Deputy President – **RG, UCD Deputy President and UCD Quality Office only**

Day 1: Tuesday 1st April 2014

Venue: Science Hub 1.47

- 09.00 - 09.30 Private meeting of Review Group (RG)
- 09.30 - 10.15 RG met with **College Principal**
- 10.15 - 10.30 Break
- 10.30 - 11.15 RG met with **Heads of School** (current and former)
- 11.15 - 11.30 Tea/coffee break
- 11.30 - 12.15 RG met with **SAR Coordinating Committee**
- 12.15 - 12.45 Break – RG reviewed key observations and prepared for lunch time meeting
- 12.45 - 13.45 **Working lunch (buffet)** – with employers and other external stakeholders
- 13.45 - 14.15 RG reviewed key observations
- 14.15 - 15:00 **Tour of facilities** conducted by Chief Technical Officer
- 15.00 - 15.15 Tea/coffee break

15.15 - 16.00	RG met with support staff representatives (administrative / technical)
16.00 - 16.10	Break
16.10 - 17.00	RG met with representative group of academic staff – primary focus on Teaching and Learning, and Curriculum issues (T&L Committee).
17.00 - 17.15	Break
17.15 - 17.45	RG met with UCD Science Associate Dean (Taught Programmes)
17.45	RG departed

Day 2: Wednesday 2nd April 2014
Venue: Science Hub 1.47

08.45 - 09.15	Private meeting of the RG
09.15 - 10.00	RG met representatives from UCD support services including UCD Human Resources, UCD Research Office, UCD Science Operations Manager, UCD International (Marketing Manager)
10.00 - 10.10	Break
10.10 - 10.40	RG met with a representative group of taught (MSc) postgraduate students
10.40 - 11.10	RG met with a representative group of current and recent postgraduate research students
11.10 - 11.30	Tea/coffee break
11.30 - 12.15	RG met with the School Research Committee
12.15 - 12.30	Break - RG reviewed key observations
12.30 - 13.15	Lunch – Review Group only
13.15 - 14.00	RG met with College Finance Manager, School Finance Administrator and Head of School to outline School's financial situation
14.00 - 14.15	RG private meeting - reviewed key observations
14.15 - 15.00	RG met with representative group of undergraduate students

15.00 - 15.15	Tea/coffee break
15.15 - 15.45	RG met with recently appointed members of staff
15.45 - 16.00	Break
16.00 - 16.30	RG met with postdoctoral researchers
16.30 - 16.45	Break
16.45 - 17.10	Private individual meetings with staff
17.15-17.30	RG met Head of School, UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science
17.30 - 18.00	RG private meeting – reviewed key observations/findings
18.00	RG departed

Day 3: Thursday 3rd April 2014
Venue: Science Hub 1.47

09.00 - 09.30	Private meeting of RG
09.30 - 10.30	RG met with Head of School
10.00-10.30	RG began preparing draft RG Report
10.30 - 10.45	Tea/coffee break
10.45 - 12.30	RG continued preparing draft RG Report
12.30 - 13.15	Lunch
13.15 – 15.00	RG finalised first draft of RG Report and feedback commendations / recommendations
15.00 - 15.15	RG met with Head of School and College Principal to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
15.15 - 15.45	Exit presentation to <u>all available staff of the unit</u>
15.45	RG departed