

Background to the IRIU Process

Irish universities are required under Section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures "from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years." In 2002, the governing authorities of all seven universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and delegated to the IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, which are institutional in their scope. The IUQB operates an institutional review process every five-six years. The IUQB's Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process is designed to confirm whether Irish universities are compliant with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of The Universities Act, and are (ii) consistent with the Part One requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005 (ESG). The IRIU process is undertaken by a team of six independent national and international reviewers selected by the IUQB Board.

Background to the University

University College Dublin (UCD) originated as the Catholic University of Ireland founded by John Henry Newman in 1854. It was then incorporated, as UCD, in the federal National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1908. UCD subsequently grew to become Ireland's largest and most diverse higher education institution. The Universities Act, 1997, established UCD as an independent and autonomous university. UCD is a comprehensive university. In 2009/10 it enrolled 27,320 students: 17,330 undergraduates; 3,351 at masters' level, 1,828 at doctoral levels and 1,716 in certificate and diploma programmes. International students represent 19.2% of total enrolment. UCD's mission is to advance knowledge, pursue truth and foster learning, in an atmosphere of creativity and innovation, drawing out the best in each student, and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland in the wider world.

The Review Team

The review was conducted by the following team of six reviewers, trained by the IUQB on Monday 7 February 2011. The Planning Visit to University College Dublin was undertaken on Tuesday 8 February 2011. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full team between Monday 28 February and Thursday 3 March 2011.

Professor Geoffrey Boulton,
Vice-Principal and Regius Professor of Geology Emeritus,
Edinburgh University, UK (*Chair*)

Professor Kerstin Sahlin,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Management, Uppsala
University, Sweden

Professor Iognáid Ó Muicheartaigh,
President Emeritus, NUI Galway, Ireland

Mr Ben Gray,
Student Liaison Officer, University of Wales, UK

Ms Anne Butler,
Director, Bize Consulting Ltd, Ireland

Dr Andrée Sursock,
Senior Advisor, European Universities Association (EUA), Belgium

Review Team Conclusions

Based on the Review Team's evaluation of the Institutional Self Assessment Report, supporting documentation and meetings conducted during the Main Review Visit, the Team found sufficient evidence to confirm:

CATEGORY	KEY REVIEWER FINDINGS
Statutory Requirements	The Review Team found that the University's activities fully comply with statutory requirements.
European Standards	The Review Team found that the University's quality arrangements are fully consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
National, European and International best practice	The University actively takes account of national, European and international best practice.

Review Team Commendations*

The Team found sufficient evidence to commend the following examples of good practice for further promotion internally, nationally and internationally:

- 1 The recent, creative, forward-looking and well-led re-organisation of UCD has stimulated major improvements in education, research and innovation, thereby enhancing its capacity to contribute to the future of Ireland. This is reflected in its impressive recent performance in international rankings of universities.
- 2 There has been an increased commitment to teaching and learning, supported by processes of formal and informal deliberation, and by the recognition of staff that strongly support the student learning experience. Procedures for quality and enhancement are well-embedded within academic units. There is an impressive and highly commendable level of international experience offered to UCD students, with plans to double the number of students who benefit.
- 3 Important initiatives have been taken to ensure integrity of research, to focus on major current issues, facilitated by the creation of cross-discipline centres, to exploit research knowledge and to stimulate entrepreneurship in postgraduate students.
- 4 An open, rigorous and competitive promotion process has been introduced, together with enhanced support for the careers of young researchers.
- 5 There are varieties of review and survey activities that provide excellent evidence bases from which to plan future improvements. The intention to co-ordinate these surveys is commendable.

Review Team Recommendations*

The Team found sufficient evidence to recommend the following activities to the University for attention and development:

- 1 It is important to sharpen the University's top-level governance processes. Ideally, the Governing Authority should be a smaller body with an appropriate mix of internal and external members. The external members, ideally experienced leaders in Irish society, should be in a position to give strategic advice to the University to help it steer through difficult times. This recommendation is broadly in line with the Hunt Report's recommendation on the role, size and composition of governing authorities. It is recommended that UCD work within the IUA to more expeditiously promote such changes. The Academic Council should also be reduced in size and its committees consolidated.
- 2 UCD should address the discrepancies in student support across the colleges and in study cycles. Minimum norms for student support should be set by the University rather than left to the discretion of the colleges.
- 3 UCD should reconsider the composition of Internal Review Groups, increase further the proportion of external members, and ensure that Chairs are external to the University.
- 4 It is important to minimise the diversity of rules and regulations across the schools, and place all academic and administrative regulations on the web.
- 5 UCD should ensure a link between quality assurance/quality improvement and the strategic process by improving the quality governance structure whilst maintaining the current level of vitality and distributed ownership.

*The five key commendations and recommendations are presented in the Summary Report. A comprehensive list of all commendations and recommendations made by the Review Team are presented in the Conclusions Section of the Full Review Report.

IUQB Board Ratification

The IUQB Board received and considered the Review Team's report on the review of University College Dublin at its meeting on 20 June 2011. The Board formally signed off the report for publication, having satisfied itself that the review process was completed in accordance with published criteria.

Further Information

The full University College Dublin review report, alongside the institutional response to the IRIU, is published in the Quality Reviews Catalogue on the IUQB Website at: <http://reviews.iuqb.net/>. Further information on the IRIU review process, internal and external reviews of Irish Universities, and the range of quality assurance and enhancement activities undertaken by the IUQB can be found on the IUQB Website www.iuqb.ie



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