UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUMINIGH

Quality Review
of the
Department of
Accounting and Finance

The University of Limerick (UL), through its membership of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), follows an established process for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI). This involves a seven-year cycle during which all Departments work to improve the quality of their programmes and services, undergo a rigorous self-evaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the field.

The process itself has evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997 in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly with the individual universities. The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) web site provides an elaboration of this process and the state of progress.

The broader picture is described in the publication *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* which can be downloaded from the IUQB web site: *http://www.iuqb.ie/*

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Quality Review Group	Appendix A
UL-QSU Web Site	www.quality.ul.ie
Web Site	www.ul.ie
IUQB Web Site	www.iuqb.ie

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1.0 Background

1.1 Legislative Framework

The University of Limerick, in common with all the universities in the Republic of Ireland, falls within the Universities Act, 1997. This Act specifies the responsibilities of universities in Ireland for Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance. Section 12 stipulates that, 'The objects of a university shall include - … to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research'.

Section 35 (1) of the Act further requires that each university Governing Authority 'shall…require the university to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university'. The Act provides a framework for the universities to develop their quality processes. Section 35 requires each university to review the quality of the work of all faculty, academic Departments and service (including administrative) Departments on a ten-year cycle. In particular 'The procedures shall include … assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university'.

Although each university is free to develop its own procedures in fulfilling its obligations under the Act, close co-operation has been achieved through the co-ordinating role of the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, (IUAQC). Accordingly, the universities have developed a framework comprising a set of common principles and operating guidelines for quality improvement and quality assurance. These principles and guidelines have been integrated into each of the universities procedures, which ensure coherence through the university system, while maintaining the autonomy of each university and its individual institutional culture.

More detail is available at *www.quality.ul.ie/The_Act.htm* and *www.iuqb.ie*

1.2 The Irish Universities Quality Board

The Governing Authorities of the seven Irish universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) in February 2003. This board comprises representatives of the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and a number of external members.

The aims of the IUQB are:

- To increase the level of inter-university cooperation in developing Quality Assurance processes

- To represent the Irish universities nationally and internationally on issues relating to quality assurance and quality improvement

- To articulate, on behalf of the Governing Authorities of the universities, the resource implications of recommendations for quality improvement.

The IUQB subsumed the roles and functions formerly carried out by the IUQSC (Irish Universities Quality Steering Committee). More detail is available at *www.iuqb.ie*

1.3   The Quality Review Process

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement systems consistent with both the legislative requirement of the Universities Act 1997 and international practice comprise the following stages:

1. Preparation of a self-assessment report by the unit taking into account feedback from students and customers.

2. Quality (Peer) Review involving external experts, both nationally and internationally, who have visited the Department, met the students and studied the Self Assessment.

3. Quality Review Report, made publicly available by the Governing Authority of the university, incorporating the quality improvement plans of the Department.

4. Continuing improvement through implementation within the resources available to the university.

More detail is available at *www.quality.ul.ie*

1.4   Management of Quality in the University

The Vice President Academic and Registrar has overall responsibility for implementation of Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement policy and implementation at the University of Limerick. Implementation is carried out by the Director of Quality.
The planned schedule of Quality Review of both academic and support departments was commenced in the year 2000, with the first full cycle of units within the University being reviewed within a seven-year cycle.

Academic departments are reviewed against international standards as described in the document "A Guide to the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments", which is available on the UL website at www.quality.ul.ie   .

In 2006, the university decided to implement a bespoke quality management system (QMS) and developed a suitable template with the assistance of external quality experts. This system is described in the document "Quality Management Systems – Standard Framework for Support Departments".

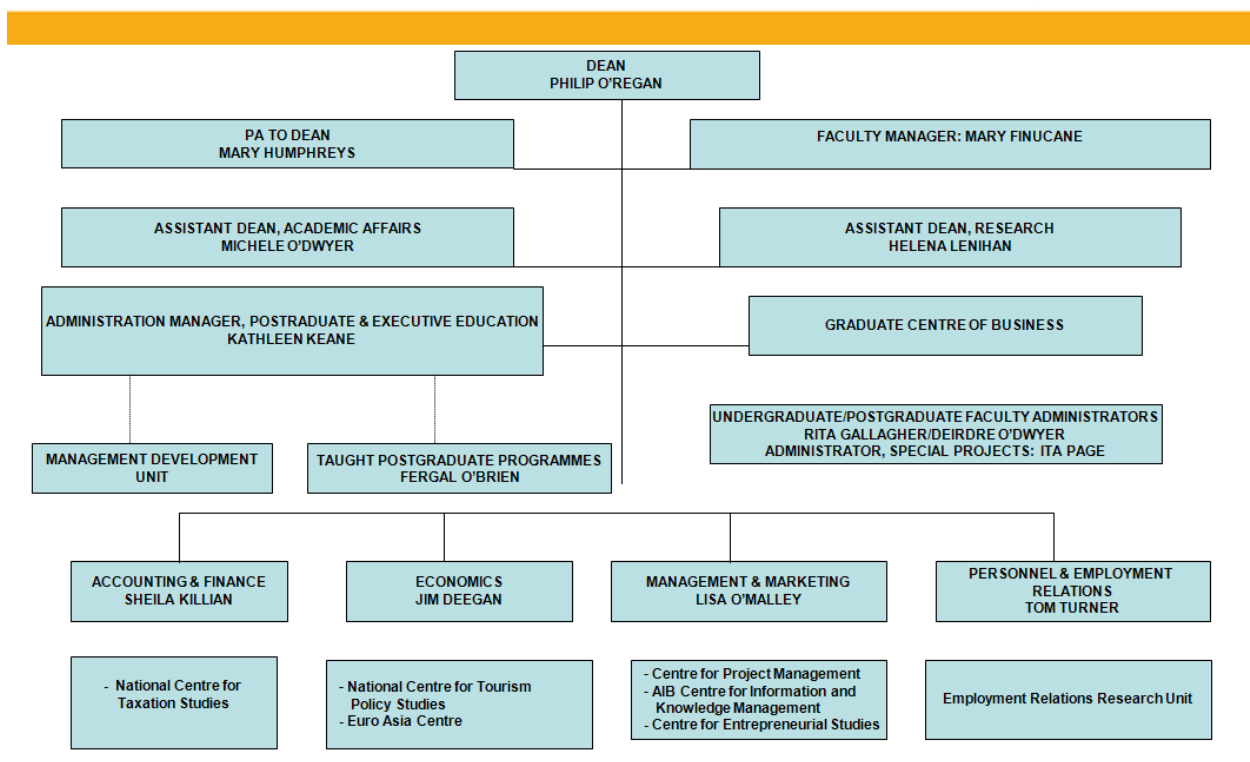More detail is available at www.quality.ul.ie

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2.0   The Department of Accounting and Finance

The Department of Accounting & Finance was formed in 1994 following a restructuring of the College of Business. The Department currently comprises 28 full-time staff and 2 research assistants. Staff members come from a variety of professional and academic backgrounds. The main disciplines within the Department are accounting, finance, insurance, risk management and taxation, and the area of governance and sustainability is an emerging topic.

The Department makes a significant contribution to programmes both within and outside the KBS. In 2004, the Department established the National Centre for Taxation Studies, a joint partnership with the Revenue Commissioners. In recent years, the Department has developed new programmes at postgraduate level, and this is now the main focus of growth.

In keeping with the goals of the UL strategic plan, the main roles of the Department of Accounting & Finance are in teaching, research, internationalisation and contribution to the community. Our objectives are to benchmark against the best academic standards and to produce both socially aware graduates with excellent, relevant technical skills and internationally recognised research to meet the current needs of the community. In all our activities, we are conscious of respecting the rights and fair expectations of our students and staff, particularly in areas of academic freedom, quality of teaching and fairness of assessment.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

KEMMY
BUSINESS SCHOOL
University of Limerick

- DEAN
  PHILIP O'REGAN

- PA TO DEAN
  MARY HUMPHREYS

- FACULTY MANAGER: MARY FINUCANE

- ASSISTANT DEAN, ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
  MICHELE O'DWYER

- ASSISTANT DEAN, RESEARCH
  HELENA LENIHAN

- ADMINISTRATION MANAGER, POSTGRADUATE & EXECUTIVE EDUCATION
  KATHLEEN KEANE

- GRADUATE CENTRE OF BUSINESS

- UNDERGRADUATE/POSTGRADUATE FACULTY ADMINISTRATORS
  RITA GALLAGHER/DEIRDRE O'DWYER
  ADMINISTRATOR, SPECIAL PROJECTS: ITA PAGE

- MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT UNIT

- TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES
  FERGAL O'BRIEN

- ACCOUNTING & FINANCE
  SHEILA KILLIAN

- ECONOMICS
  JIM DEEGAN

- MANAGEMENT & MARKETING
  LISA O'MALLEY

- PERSONNEL & EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
  TOM TURNER

- National Centre for Taxation Studies

- National Centre for Tourism Policy Studies
- Euro Asia Centre

- Centre for Project Management
- AIB Centre for Information and Knowledge Management
- Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies

Employment Relations Research Unit

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3.0   The Follow-up Process

The Quality Review process occurs on an approximately seven-year cycle at the University of Limerick. An average of five academic Departments are reviewed annually. Once the Peer Review Group report is finalised, the Department concerned immediately sets about planning its response to the issues raised therein.

The self-evaluation process is intended to be a reflective exercise in which a Department/Division should identify many of its strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to strengthen and grow as appropriate. Quite often, the Peer Review Group (PRG) will reinforce these issues and may identify areas of concern that were overlooked. In many cases, the PRG will also highlight the strengths of the Department and encourage faculty and staff to take advantage of these.

After the department and the university have been given time to respond to the issues raised; the Peer Review Group's report will be made available to the wider community through the University's web site. Normally, the report is available within the University less than four weeks after the PRG visit. Responses and plans for action are incorporated into the report and are subject to the approval of the University's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee. Presentation to the committee usually follows within six months of the PRG visit. The Governing Authority will publish the Peer Review report, including reactions and plans, following approval.

It is expected that a review of progress in implementing recommendations and investigating issues raised would occur quarterly for the two years following the Peer Review Visit. Progress Reports will be published as deemed appropriate.

Date	Action
February 2012	Department is issued with Peer Review Group report and required to prepare reactions and plans for Quality Improvement as appropriate. The report is circulated to all members of Management Committee for comment.
February 2012	PRG Report, incorporating reactions, is presented to UL Executive Committee for discussion, as appropriate and published.
May 2012	Reactions and plans incorporated into the Quality Improvement Action Plan and circulated to GA Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance committee. PRG Report with Responses and Quality Improvement Action Plan are tabled at GA-SPQAC meeting for discussion.
February 2013	Head of Department, Dean, Vice President Academic & Registrar and Director of Quality discuss progress with resolution of recommendations and outstanding items are referred to Executive Committee, Academic Council and/or Governing Authority as appropriate.

4.0 Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

The Peer Review Group (PRG) wishes to thank and commend the members of the Department of Accounting and Finance for the preparation of their comprehensive and insightful self-assessment report (SAR), their formal reactions to preliminary queries from the PRG, and their most willing and helpful participation in the review throughout the PRG visit.

The PRG's overall impression is of a vibrant and cohesive department committed to achieving excellence in teaching and research in the face of resource constraints and new strategic priorities being identified by the University.

Particular attention is being directed to continuing the development of the Department's research productivity, and internationalisation is recognised as a priority for the future.

The PRG noted the range of courses offered by the Department and the quality of its facilities and support staff. These ensure an effective educational environment and learning experience that enhance students' preparation for their future professional development.

The overall effectiveness and distinctive culture of the Department's learning environment is clearly appreciated by its students, and also by its strong cohort of stakeholder employers.

The following commendations and recommendations developed by the PRG are intended to contribute to the Department's clear commitment to continued excellence in teaching, research and professional recognition.

5.0 The Report of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

5.1 Mission

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.1.1	The comprehensive range of programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level currently provided by the Department.
5.1.2	The Department's record in producing graduates who are well prepared for the workplace.
5.1.3	The continuing student demand for programmes offered by the Department despite the current economic climate.
5.1.4	The progress made in identifying and defining the key competencies of students undertaking the Department's programmes.
5.1.5	The excellent relationships that the Department has developed and sustained with stakeholders.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.1.6	Develop as a matter of urgency a departmental mission and strategic plan, which reflect the mission and strategy of the KBS. The Department's strategic goals should be supported by clear and measurable objectives to be monitored over a three-year horizon.
5.1.7	Develop a departmental definition of internationalisation. Carry out a review of internationalisation activities in the Department and use this as the basis for the development of an internationalisation strategy.
5.1.8	The PRG endorses the recommendation made in 1.10 of the Department's SAR for an integrated approach to the marketing of all KBS and interfaculty undergraduate programmes with a view to increasing their visibility and attractiveness.

5.2   Design and Content of Curriculum

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.2.1	The Department's postgraduate programmes which offer a rounded education where knowledge and skills are often developed in innovative ways.
5.2.2	The undergraduate programmes which have well-thought-out and well-constructed curricula, giving students opportunities to specialise and preparing them exceptionally well for the world of work.
5.2.3	The Cooperative Education programme which gives the Department a competitive edge, adds significant value to the students who participate and is spoken of very highly by employer stakeholders.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.2.4	Develop a set of graduate attributes which are programme-specific and in alignment with those currently being developed by the University.
5.2.5	Undertake a skills mapping exercise across all undergraduate programmes (owned and co-owned) to identify skills development and gaps in order to ensure that skills development is fully embedded in the curriculum and in line with 5.2.4.
5.2.6	Undertake a benchmarking activity of the knowledge and skills in the curricula with those of competitor institutions in order to better understand and maintain the distinctiveness of the Department's undergraduate offerings.
5.2.7	Continue to seek greater engagement of first-year undergraduate students through a review of the curricula and of teaching and assessment methods.
5.2.8	As a matter of urgency and in conjunction with the CoOp Office, review the co-op placement process to ensure that student requirements and employer needs are aligned and optimised.

5.3   Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.3.1	The strong support for students going on co-op placements and entering the graduate workplace.
5.3.2	The comprehensive suite of teaching modes being applied across the Department.
5.3.3	The active engagement of the Department with the Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL) and the positive outcomes reflected in the number of nominations submitted and awards received for teaching excellence.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.3.4	Reduce tutorial sizes in line with the 2004 quality review (i.e., a target of an absolute maximum of 20 students should be set).
5.3.5	In large undergraduate modules, require the module coordinator to teach at least one tutorial per module.
5.3.6	Pursue opportunities to increase the number of international co-op placements and actively encourage students to take these placements.
5.3.7	Explore the use of a wider range of assessment tools in large modules to enhance the development of higher-level transferable skills and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.
5.3.8	Undertake an assessment mapping exercise across all undergraduate programmes (owned and co-owned), which considers scheduling and types of assessment, to ensure that students have an appropriate mix of methods to assess both skills and knowledge.

5.4   Facilities and Learning Resources

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.4.1	The high quality of physical facilities in terms of classrooms, tutorial/breakout rooms and IT and PC laboratories reflected in high levels of satisfaction in student surveys.
5.4.2	The state-of-the-art simulated trading floor which is unique among Irish universities.
5.4.3	The sharing of good-quality learning facilities, such as the replica courtroom and the computer-assisted language laboratory.
5.4.4	The good library facilities and services with high levels of student and staff satisfaction.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.4.5	Seek to secure that the maximum number of KBS-owned and co-owned programmes have lectures and tutorials scheduled in the KBS/Schumann Building with a view to creating a more vibrant, inclusive and collegiate KBS student experience.
5.4.6	Base doctoral students within the KBS/Schumann building to provide them with a more conducive, integrated working environment and to contribute to a more vibrant KBS experience.
5.4.7	Implement the use of a common e-learning environment (whether Sulis or SharePoint) for hosting learning resources. The use of personal websites for delivering course notes and, more importantly, assessment results should be discontinued immediately given the related significant data protection and security risks.
5.4.8	Enhance the utilisation and return from the simulated trading floor, which has significant annual non-pay costs, through: (i) Extending the usage of the trading floor by other modules and faculties where possible. (ii) Promoting the trading floor facility externally, with a view to securing executive courses and funding towards student awards and sponsorships, thereby generating additional funding to defray the high annual non-pay costs.

5.5   Staff

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.5.1	The critical mass of staff who hold a professional qualification.
5.5.2	The high proportion of staff who hold or are undertaking a PhD qualification.
5.5.3	The limited reliance on part-time teaching staff and the resultant problems sometimes associated with this.
5.5.4	The high quality of teaching as recognised in student feedback.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.5.5	As a matter of urgency, ensure the appointment or promotion of at least two senior staff at professorial level to provide leadership and mentoring within the Department.
5.5.6	Facilitate greater take-up of sabbatical leave, particularly special research leave, to enhance research opportunities and outputs within the Department. Resources should be provided by the University to support the related costs.
5.5.7	Develop a departmental definition of 'research active', determine the outcomes typically expected of a research active member of staff, and feed this into the annual PDRS process.
5.5.8	At KBS level, empower the Department to develop its own targets (which should be aligned to KBS and UL targets) for the four key areas of research, teaching, international focus and contribution to the economic, educational, social and cultural life of Ireland.
5.5.9	At UL level, reinstate the non-academic grade review mechanism as soon as possible.
5.5.10	Develop a more structured approach to the development of teaching skills for new teaching faculty.

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5.6   Student Guidance and Support

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.6.1	The First Seven Weeks programme which offers excellent support to new students.
5.6.2	The wide availability of faculty to students with, for example, all staff having office hours and/or open door policies.
5.6.3	The opportunity provided to all students to engage with an academic adviser in the Department.
5.6.4	The peer-supported learning programme which has brought significant benefits to all students who have engaged with it.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.6.5	Promote peer-supported learning amongst students to ensure that there is an accurate understanding of its role and purpose and to ensure that engagement with peer-supported learning is at optimal levels.
5.6.6	Introduce year tutors into large undergraduate programmes to support the work of course directors and academic advisers. The role, importance and value of academic advisers should be made clear to students along with the students' responsibility to engage with their academic advisers.
5.6.7	Make clear to students that attendance at tutorials, especially in the first year of undergraduate programmes, is important, valuable and expected. The Department should monitor attendance at first-year undergraduate tutorials and develop a policy on the most appropriate responses to non-attendance.
5.6.8	To improve the effectiveness of communication, undertake a review of how the Department formally communicates with students. This review should involve input from students.
5.6.9	Encourage more staff to improve their adviser skills through completing courses such as para-counselling (listening skills) and ASSIST (prevention of suicide).

5.7 Research Activity

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.7.1	The high proportion of staff who already hold or are undertaking a PhD.
5.7.2	The high levels of research outputs currently produced by the Department.
5.7.3	The significant improvement in the research culture since the quality review undertaken in 2004.
5.7.4	The positive feedback from postgraduate research students in terms of the PhD process.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.7.5	Ensure that all the members of staff who hold a PhD take responsibility for an equitable share of PhD supervision.
5.7.6	Investigate additional ways (such as, for example, through the workload allocation model) in which more capacity can be created to enable staff to engage further in research-related activities.
5.7.7	Develop a more sophisticated approach to evaluating the quality of research output which goes beyond established journal ranking lists. ISI and ABS listing should act only as a starting point in this development.
5.7.8	Develop a more structured approach to identifying and securing funding for future PhD students. The PRG urges the University to increase the number of funded scholarships available for PhD studies.
5.7.9	At KBS level, empower the Department to develop an internal research seminar series to encourage informal discussion, sharing of research ideas and engagement of non-research active staff.

5.8 Department Organisation and Management

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.8.1	The collegiality and culture of support and volunteerism across the Department.
5.8.2	The strong contribution of the Department to the work of the Faculty and the wider University through common teaching programmes and modules, research on cross-cutting themes, and involvement in committees at faculty and university levels.
5.8.3	The successful implementation of University policies by the Department.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.8.4	Further develop and fully implement the workload allocation model. The strategic goals developed in accordance with recommendation 5.1.6 should flow into the workload allocation model in terms of directing the resources of the Department to the achievement of these goals. At individual faculty member level, individual goals and objectives should be aligned through the PDRS process to the Department's strategic goals.
5.8.5	Formally report to the Dean of the KBS the Department's annual performance (both quantitative and qualitative) against the agreed objectives in accordance with 5.1.6.
5.8.6	At University level, explore the implementation of a multi-annual budgeting process to provide the Department with a level of certainty and control over its budget, thereby allowing it to secure external funding to support programmes and initiatives over a two- to three-year period.
5.8.7	Provide appropriate skills development training and support as part of a clear transition from the outgoing Head of Department (HoD) to her/his successor. The appointment of the HoD is a key management role and should have regard to the key competencies and skills required and not be based solely on rotation.

5.9   Quality Improvement Plan

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.9.1	The development of a workable initial quality improvement plan.
5.9.2	The identification of responsibilities for the achievement of planned actions.
5.9.3	The identification of timeframes for the achievement of planned actions.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.9.4	Revise the quality improvement plan once the departmental strategic plan is finalised. Ensure improvement actions are aligned to the relevant objectives in the departmental strategic plan.
5.9.5	Incorporate the recommendations of the PRG into the quality improvement plan and align these to the departmental strategic plan.
5.9.6	Review the quality improvement plan to ensure that all elements of the departmental strategic plan and the recommendations of the PRG are given adequate attention.

Appendices

A   Membership of the Peer Review Group:

Prof. Brian Osborne	PRG Chairperson, Quality Consultant, Queens' University, Kingston, Ontario.
Dr. Andy Adcroft	Director of Academic Development, Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, University of Surrey
Ms. Carol Lacey	Director of Education, Insurance Institute of Ireland
Mr. Ken Johnson	Senior Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Limerick.
Prof. Joan Ballantine	Professor of Accounting, Department of Accounting, University of Ulster
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	Recording Secretary

B   Membership of the A&F Quality Team:

Mairead Breathnach	Quality Team Leader, Lecturer, Accounting & Finance
Dr. Elaine Doyle	Lecturer, Taxation
Dr. Antoinette Flynn	Lecturer, Accounting & Finance
Prof. Tom Kennedy	Professor of Accounting
Dr. Sheila Killian	Head, Department of Accounting & Finance
Tineke Leonard	Senior Administrator, Department of Accounting & Finance
Dr. Martin Mullins	Lecturer, Risk Management & Insurance
Dr. Fergal O'Brien	Lecturer, Finance
Kathleen Regan	Lecturer, Accounting & Finance

C   Contact

The Peer Review Group were given the opportunity over three days to talk to the department Quality Team both formally and informally. Meetings with staff, postgraduate & undergraduate students and others were scheduled as group sessions. The Review Group was given the opportunity to meet all staff during a visit to the facilities of the department and this was most helpful.

All the meetings provided extremely useful additional information to support the SAR.

END OF REPORT