Quality Review
of the
Irish World Academy
of Music and Dance

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.irishworldacademy.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 Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) 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 reactions and quality improvement plans of the Division and University.

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 Irish World Academy of Music and Dance

The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance was established at the University of Limerick in 1994 with the creation of the first Chair of Music. Under the direction of its Founder Director, Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, it has grown from its initial formation as a centre for postgraduate research in music and dance to an Academy comprised of two undergraduate programmes, nine taught postgraduate programmes and two PhD tracks. Encompassing a wide range of specialisations from Irish traditional music and dance to classical strings, chant and ritual song, community music, music therapy and music education among others, it has in excess of 300 students from over 30 different countries. Since 2010, the Academy has been housed in a new, state of the art building on the banks of the river Shannon at the heart of the campus. Acoustically treated and with sprung floors throughout the dance spaces, the building offers excellent facilities in a space of great aesthetic beauty. The most recent initiative of the Academy, the Festive Arts programme, will see the Academy expand from its current specialisations in music and dance to embrace a wider range of art forms under the rubric of 'Festive Arts' to include street theatre, mime, puppetry, story-telling and carnival. The Stepping Stones scholarship fund is a three-year initiative aimed at attracting postgraduate students from parts of the world currently underrepresented at the Academy to make the Academy truly global in its scope and student body. To date, it has attracted performers and scholars from China, Malaysia, Russia, Israel, the Dominican Republic, Columbia, Mexico and Ghana.

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
April 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.
April 2012	PRG Report, incorporating reactions, is presented to UL Executive Committee for discussion, as appropriate.
June 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.
March 2013	Director, 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.

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4.0 Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

The (PRG) much appreciated the comprehensive and carefully written self-assessment report (SAR) of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD), which was informative and written with an appropriately analytical slant. It presented the clear strengths of the Academy and also acknowledged areas which had been identified for possible improvement.

Key to the Academy's excellence is the inspirational leadership of its Director.

In our discussions, the staff of the Academy were found to be open, reflective and helpful and willing to engage positively in debate. Particularly obvious were the strong team spirit and a clear and consistent attitude showing dedication to teaching, performance and research. Our questions were answered clearly and concisely and additional information requested was provided fully and promptly. We are much indebted to the staff for the cooperation received which greatly facilitated our task.

The vision of the Academy is "to be a vibrant place of possibility that nourishes the development of a creative consciousness and thoughtful engagement with our local and global communities", and this overarching ambition came through in all our interactions with staff.

Students, graduates and stakeholders to whom we spoke were unanimously generous in their praise of the Academy and its staff.

The apparently unique and anomalous position of the Academy within the structure of the University of Limerick (UL) – existing as it does outside the UL faculty structure although its programmes are processed through a faculty board, and with a direct management line to the office of the Vice President Academic & Registrar – was the subject of considerable discussion regarding both vulnerabilities and opportunities.

The present financial climate in Ireland has meant that, although the Academy is housed in a modern, purpose-constructed building, funding for instruments and other equipment has been severely limited and some areas of costly and highly specialised space are being used inappropriately for generic university purposes. An innovative approach to resolving this situation is urgently required.

Also in need of innovative approaches are the recognition of the particular demands of one-to-one/small class teaching and the inadequacy of the university's current promotion model to reward appropriately excellence in practice, particularly in comparison to research as currently defined.

The obvious pride of the University in the Academy is fully justified.

5.0 The Report of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

5.1 Mission

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.1.1	The mission which is an organic expression of the Academy's history and ethos and is coherent with the programmes currently run and planned at the IWAMD.
5.1.2	The centrality of the student experience as the guiding principle of its goals and activities as captured in the principle "finding your own voice".
5.1.3	The richness and diversity of the Academy's pedagogic programmes which aim to bring practice and reflection together with a focus on connecting the near (communities) and the far (internationalisation), the individual (experience) and the social (research).
5.1.4	The ongoing commitment to making connections with professional arts groups and community-based groups through partnerships and localised initiatives, both national and international.
5.1.5	The capacity to think across disciplines and to innovate the way in which the temporal and spatial range of performance is connected across traditions, cultures and languages.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.1.6	Give careful consideration and reflect on how to retain the vibrancy and historical identity of the Academy, while preparing for planned and unforeseen changes that will affect both the organisation and the context in which it operates.
5.1.7	Increase the centrality of coherent policy formulation with a view to consolidating the Academy's future legacy as well as providing shared principles that might guide and foster individual contributions and aspirations.
5.1.8	Actively promote and celebrate the unique identity of the Academy both to local stakeholders, its clients and the general public as part of the Academy's strategic planning process.
5.1.9	Introduce more explicit reference to employment and research opportunities available to students in each area of practice, aiming to increase awareness of professional practice existing in Ireland and abroad.
5.1.10	Expand through programmes and partnerships the international strategies aimed at attracting people, whether students or experts, who will contribute to sustain the open flow of ideas and influences envisioned by the Academy.

5.2   Design and Content of Curriculum

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.2.1	The unique and innovative suite of programmes which makes the Academy significant internationally.
5.2.2	The good balance of contextual study blended with reflective practice in the curriculum – a balance which seeks to produce creative graduates who can think for themselves and a model of excellence for the rest of the University in line with its desired graduate attributes.
5.2.3	The international team of visiting staff which ensures the high-level delivery of curricular teaching as befits the aspirational mission of both the University and the Academy.
5.2.4	The strong cohort of external examiners which ensures quality, gives feedback and advances curriculum delivery standards year on year.
5.2.5	The Academy elective system with emphasis on self-directed learning which enhances the student experience within the MA programmes.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.2.6	Undertake a root-and-branch curriculum review. This process would appraise and take full benefit of best practice in provision across the Academy. The object would be to ensure continued coherence in the portfolio of programmes.
5.2.7	Extend the success of the Academy elective system to the undergraduate programmes in order to embed choice, creativity and self-direction in the curriculum from the earliest stages.
5.2.8	Set up a KPI (key performance indicators) benchmarking club with four or five peer institutions internationally in order to obtain the hard statistics necessary to justify the premium funding of an expensive subject area.
5.2.9	Devise a new programme in festive arts. Investigate the possible construction of this as a generic MA programme under which a rainbow of new specialisms can be grown which would help support both the local and the national infrastructure for the performing and traditional arts in Ireland.
5.2.10	Investigate, as part of the curriculum review process, the sustainability of programmes with small cohorts and low critical mass, given the appropriately high-level student experience to which the Academy aspires. As part of this same process, explore the relationship with the Irish Chamber Orchestra.
5.2.11	Introduce the new programme in festive arts as part of the curriculum review and utilise this initiative to extend the public value of the student performance programme to the entire Mid-West region.

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5.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.3.1	The positive diversity of pedagogic activities which, in their design, respond well to the needs and characteristics of different programmes and areas of practice.
5.3.2	The calibre and standing of visiting artists and academics, whose contributions enhance the value of teaching at the Academy.
5.3.3	The attention given to academic guidance and the quality of the information provided in each course outline and the handbooks available to students.
5.3.4	The comprehensive assessment methodologies that are applied across the full range of the Academy's programmes, being based on reflection and practice.
5.3.5	The adoption of one-to-one/small class tutorial formats which contribute to enhance the intensity of the student experience as well as the development of excellence in performance idioms.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.3.6	Work towards the definition of more structured and consistent approaches to the selection and employment of teaching assistants.
5.3.7	Persevere in the elaboration of forms of feedback both to and from students that might expand or complement traditional formats of text-based communication, particularly in those cases concerning special needs and disabilities.
5.3.8	Increase the use of teaching and learning technologies, both in the way relationships between teachers and students are mediated and in increased access to media content.
5.3.9	Undertake regular reviews aimed at ensuring that teaching and assessment are applied consistently to students working in different performance idioms and genres.

5.4   Facilities and Learning Resources

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.4.1	The bespoke design of dedicated rehearsal, teaching and resource spaces in the Academy building, including sprung floors and acoustically treated rooms throughout.
5.4.2	The inspiring sense of community evident between the Academy students and staff, which encourages creativity and connectivity.
5.4.3	The successful use of Sulis to further engage students, enhance their learning and monitor their activities.
5.4.4	The Academy's proactive efforts to secure philanthropic support for needed resources and the upkeep of the IWAMD building.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.4.5	Ensure the integrity of specialist rooms for intended purposes.
5.4.6	Create benchmark-researched arguments for the funding stream of the one-to-one/small class teaching structure.
5.4.7	Devise a consultative process involving external benchmarking to create and communicate a clear strategic argument that justifies the required and necessary funding from UL.
5.4.8	Actively pursue solutions for imperative equipment and resources such as more pianos, classroom writing tables, light and sound equipment for the theatre and a dedicated postgraduate space. Solutions might include, for example, a leasing contract for pianos and sharing the dedicated research area amongst all postgraduate students.
5.4.9	Encourage staff to submit new library requests on a more constant basis and within the appropriate timeframe to maximise readily available resources for students (in particular, with regard to classical and chamber music and scores).

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5.5   Staff

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.5.1	The international calibre of staff.
5.5.2	The appetite of staff to keep themselves research active, despite teaching pressures, through the uptake of sabbaticals.
5.5.3	The quality levels and evidence of esteem of research outputs in reflection and practice.
5.5.4	The high aspirations and enthusiasm levels of staff.
5.5.5	The proportion of mature students on postgraduate programmes whose expertise contributes to the vibrancy of the taught experience.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.5.6	Explore sustainable funding for one-to-one/small class and team teaching by setting up an International Advisory Panel of peers to look at premium funding models for expensive subjects in comparable national domains in order to keep the Academy internationally competitive in a global HE marketplace.
5.5.7	Review the relationship of the Academy with the HR Division of the University. As a consequence of this, thoroughly develop the staff base (from part-time teaching assistant through to full-time research-active staff) in all aspects of teaching practice including the use of digital technology. This is in order to take into account best practice internationally so that staff may deliver the best experience to the student and keep the Academy internationally competitive. It includes the need to develop formal induction and mentoring for all new staff including those classed as teaching assistants.
5.5.8	Develop a system of career review to ensure that reward, recognition and promotion are not solely based on publication in selective peer-reviewed journals.
5.5.9	Investigate the strategic positioning of the student voice within the Academy in order to maintain the current vibrancy of the staff-student interaction and to future proof the relevance of the curriculum.
5.5.10	Review the need for venue technician support to enhance the audience and performer experience in the Academy's public performance space. At present, there is only one full-time technical staff member for 300 students in the Academy.

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5.6   Student Guidance and Support

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.6.1	The belief universally held across the student body that the staff are approachable, helpful and supportive.
5.6.2	The open-door staff policy for students in relation to academic support which provides an intimate, frequent and immediate exchange.
5.6.3	The active election of representatives to the Student Forum that meets with the Director and Academy Administrator twice a semester to facilitate direct communication for students and management at the highest level.
5.6.4	The active and informative liaison with UL's Co-operative Education & Careers Division to support placement and appropriate advice for the specialised disciplines of the Academy.
5.6.5	The proposal to develop further the resources within UL's Writing Centre and to include satellite classes as part of the Academy's programmes.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.6.6	Update the Academy's website with greater frequency in regard to news and programme notices to maintain the Academy's online presence at the highest level.
5.6.7	Investigate and clarify the provision of UL learning supports to non-EU postgraduate students with disabilities.
5.6.8	Reintroduce appropriate fitness classes in the dance programmes for maintenance and injury prevention.
5.6.9	Invite national arts organisations, funding bodies and support agencies to give regular tutorials that will help students transition into the realities of the professional performance world.
5.6.10	Actively seek to install an in-house physiotherapist, which is appropriate to the Academy's specialised disciplines, whose presence would have an impact on the overall level of health within the student body.
5.6.11	Liaise with the heath and safety officer to create urgent policy for injury and other emergency matters, so that appropriate channels of communication are available for relief.

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5.7   Research Activity

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.7.1	The organic growth of the eight MA programmes that bring together arts practice and reflection that demonstrate the strengths of faculty expertise and community connections.
5.7.2	The creation in 2009 of an Arts Practice PhD that attracts professional performers who want to examine a topic that springs from their own performance practice, and the development of an exemplary set of modules that give candidates the practice and reflective tools to be successful.
5.7.3	The recognition of four foundational research clusters – Irish Music and Dance Studies, Music and Health, Performance of Mobile Identities, and Arts Practice – each of which springs from faculty strength and student and community interest, as well as demonstrating potential for attracting high-quality students, professionals and external funding.
5.7.4	The innovative proposal to secure funds from the University to match Stepping Stones funding to allow MA scholarship students to continue in one of the doctoral programmes.
5.7.5	The establishment of the Research Academy Panel (RAP) to assess PhD applicants, evaluate their progress and serve in adjudication of fee waivers.
5.7.6	The high quality and range to date of both staff and student research and performance practice.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.7.7	Activate the established Research Academy Panel, document the progress of students through the programmes, and follow their progress after leaving the Academy.
5.7.8	Using the Research Academy Panel model, develop a research plan for both staff and students that reflects not only the process but the range of outcomes, including audio and visual recordings, performances, choreographies and musical composition, articles, edited volumes and book-length monographs.
5.7.9	Continue to negotiate with the University for a higher number of doctoral scholarships, especially given the diversity of gender, age, experience and national origin of the applicants.
5.7.10	After consultation with institutions offering comparable programmes in Ireland and globally, design a model of assessment that represents the Academy's position in which practice and reflection are mutually supportive, and advocate it to the University.

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5.8   Department Organisation and Management

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.8.1	The creative organisation by working groups characterised by function – building, timetable, equipment, performance examination, and research – rather than by disciplinary specialisation. This is consistent with the communal sense of the Academy and prevents retreat into narrow disciplinary concerns and competition.
5.8.2	The collegial, inclusive, and non-hierarchical Academy structure comprising the Coordinating Group (all staff meeting weekly), the Director's Group which reports matters from students and the University to the Coordinating Group, and the Student Forum which brings student concerns to the Director's Group.
5.8.3	The annual review day allowing for progress reports and issues to be examined as well as the occasional visioning retreats that allow for exploring possibilities and establishing a set of future directions.
5.8.4	The excellent communication systems of the website for the Academy and the biannual publication of *Comhaimseartha/Of Our Times* that lists all the seminars, concerts, and staff and student activities as well as organisations that comprise the Academy within and beyond the University.
5.8.5	The thoughtful, consultative process culminating in the MA Festive Arts programme that will call upon the diverse and considerable strengths of the already existing programmes under the leadership of a new course director who will continue the close relationship between the Academy, the University and the community.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.8.6	As a priority, design and implement a strategic plan that will address changes to the status of the Academy within the University structure. The plan should have clear benchmarks, reflect conversations across the campus community and include consultations with relevant institutions, individuals and stakeholders.
5.8.7	Consider the approaching transition to a new Director and the implications of a shift in leadership for the first time since the Academy's founding and enter into conversations with relevant stakeholders, programmes and offices. Comparative analysis of positions held by directors working in similar institutions is recommended.
5.8.8	Examine further the degree to which collaborations are possible across programmes at both student and staff levels, in innovative teaching projects and in collaborative performance and research endeavours.

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5.9   Quality Improvement Plan

Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

5.9.1	The clarity with which the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has been structured and articulated. In their synthetic format, all issues identified in the QIP represent a coherent and relevant expression of the topics discussed throughout the SAR.
5.9.2	The proposed actions address each issue through distinct initiatives that are both achievable and suitably pragmatic. The proposed implementation timeline is also appropriate.

Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

5.9.3	Devise complementary forms of mapping which might assist the communication of the QIP to relevant personnel; for instance, through the use of alternative graphic layouts that might represent different ways to organise systemic relations during the various stages of the implementation of the plan.

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Appendices

A   Membership of the Peer Review Group:

Dr David Whan	PRG Chairperson, Quality Consultant, UK.
Ms Jean Butler	Dancer and Choreographer, New York, USA.
Prof. Anya Peterson Royce	Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA.
Davide Terlingo	Head of Dance, The Arts Council, Ireland
Prof. John Wallace	Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, UK.
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	Recording Secretary, Limerick.

B   Membership of the IWAMD Quality Team:

Dr Orfhlaith Ní Bhríain	Lecturer in Dance
Barbara Christie	Administrator, Director's Office (Recording Secretary)
Dr Aileen Dillane	Lecturer in Music
Paula Dundon	Academy Administrator
Dr Sandra Joyce	Acting Associate Director and Course Director, MA Irish Music and Dance
Dr Niall Keegan	Course Director, BA Irish Music and Dance
Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin	Director, Irish World Academy, (on sabbatical 2013)
Dr Helen Phelan	Acting Director, Irish World Academy and Programme Director, PhD Arts Practice. (Team Leader)

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