

RESPONSE BY INDUSTRIAL DESIGN QA/QI COMMITTEE TO PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

We wish to thank warmly the members of the Peer Review Group (PRG), everyone who contributed to the Self Assessment Report (SAR), those who participated in the visit by the PRG and Nicky Saunders, who co-ordinated the visit most efficiently.

It is clear that the PRG read the SAR with great thoroughness and with an understanding informed by their practical and academic experiences. Their visit was conducted efficiently and the interviews appear to have elicited considerable information in a relatively short time.

We are particularly pleased that the PRG recognised the undoubted success of the course and the skills and commitment of all those who contribute to it.

The Department concurs with all of their findings. One or two comments probably indicate a lack of clarity on our part but these are minor. The substantive issues mentioned all fully reflect our own concerns and include: lack of progress in developing postgraduate activities; the need for careful monitoring of the revised course; the focus on operational matters; weak communications in the Faculty and College; and poor staff development structures. It is important to note that a significant fraction of the action items highlighted cannot be resolved within the Department but require policy development and resource inputs at Faculty, College and even Government levels.

Plans for a postgraduate course in medical product design, though included in the College Development Plan, 2001, has yet to be allocated the necessary development resources. At the moment there is discussion about ID involvement in a proposed multidisciplinary design course at MA level. The recent appointment of a Head of Postgraduate Development should assist these proposals to proceed.

The Department supports and is very familiar with modularisation, since the University of Limerick element of the 'old' course was based on a modular structure and its benefits are well understood. However a College standard for the creation of 'the module' must be determined before modularisation of courses can begin. The ancillary aspects of modularisation - ECTS, equivalence etc will then follow.

Similarly, the Department has always recognised the importance of the Bologna Process, particularly the 3+2 model that is intended to promote the principal objectives of creating an "open EU area for higher education" and enhanced student mobility. This is the model being rapidly adopted by similar colleges to ours throughout Europe and we are concerned that our very active and successful exchange programmes may be curtailed if action is not taken, probably at Government level.

Physical resources need to be improved and the suggestion that funding might be found in sources other than from Government is noted. The importance of properly integrated spaces was noted by the PRG and in this matter we fully concur. Facilities distant from the studio will always be under-utilised.

Public relations activity is an adjunct to fundraising from private sources but to be successful needs resources in the form of money and skilled professionals. This must be a College activity.

Also at College level there have been some steps made recently in formalising staff development that are welcome. A more defined programme for staff members is a good suggestion.

At Department level there are many relevant suggestions. In regard to the revised course structure we agree that change without adequate alternative provision is inappropriate and the course will be carefully monitored as part of the on-going QA/QI programme.

In the interests of quality improvement, the Department will listen to advice from any source but the limits of the role of the External Examiner, as the agent of the National University of Ireland, must be recognised and not compromised. Consultancy arrangements with experienced academics may be useful.

Some improvements in general communications are also noted and suggestions will be sought from students and staff with a view to improvement. A student handbook will help in clarifying overall requirements though its utility is limited at project level, where most problems seem to reside.

It is true that there is a paucity of strategic discussion at Faculty level but it should be noted that at Department level, in addition to the routine operational meetings, there has been numerous meetings particularly in the past three years, concerned with course review and course revision which were strategic in nature. Whilst baulking at the notion that there are "too few meetings", nonetheless the point is taken and the regular Departmental and Staff meetings (scheduled but frequently cancelled) will be given greater priority.

In conclusion, I am confident that the QA/QI Committee can now prepare a Quality Improvement Plan and seek to obtain the necessary resources in order to ensure its implementation, in co-operation with the College Quality Assurance Officer. The plan will refer to all of the issues mentioned above and will include monitoring of the revised course, strategic and operational planning, postgraduate development, staff development and student feedback.

The Industrial Design QA/QI Committee welcomes the report of the PRG. The recommendations made in relation to improving the quality of the Department are appreciated. The Department is in a process of continuing change and already, since the time of the site visit we can point to several changes in place and further ones underway.

Paul Fortune,
Chairman.
19 May 2005