



**INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW  
SCHOOL OF PHARMACY 2014**

RCSI DEVELOPING HEALTHCARE LEADERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WORLDWIDE

# School of Pharmacy Peer Review Group Report

## DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

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# 1 Context for Review

## 1.1 Membership of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

Sinead Dunwoody, Clinical Relationship Manager, RCSI.

Professor Zena Moore, Professor and Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery, RCSI.

Adrian Thomas, Director of Quality, University of Limerick (Chair)

Professor David Wright, Deputy Head of School, School of Pharmacy, University of East Anglia. UK

## 1.2 Terms of reference of the Review Group

The terms of reference of the PRG were to:

- Critically evaluate the SAR and the supporting documentation
- Verify how well the aims and objectives of the unit are being fulfilled, having regard to the available resources, and comment on the appropriateness of the unit's mission, objectives and strategic plan
- Comment on how well the unit fits with the strategic plans for the College as a whole
- Evaluate the unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as outlined in the SAR
- Discuss any perceived strengths and weaknesses not identified in the SAR
- Assess the suitability of the working environment(s)
- Comment on any recommendations proposed by the unit in its SAR
- Make appropriate recommendations for improvement, with due consideration of resource implications

## **2 Introduction and overview of the School of Pharmacy**

### **2.1 Introduction and Unit Details**

The School of Pharmacy is a relatively new academic unit of the RCSI, having been formed in 2002. It currently has 19 staff and over 400 students, it delivers undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and has an active research community. The school has grown rapidly since its inception, completely filling the available space and has established itself as a cornerstone of Irish pharmacy education and research. New developments include the exciting MPharm integrated programme which has the potential to attract international students in significant numbers.

### **2.2 Senior Management Structure**

The school is managed by the Head of School who reports directly to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science. The school currently has a flat management structure which has served it well during the first growth stages. The school's self-assessment identified a need to review management structures in order to devolve some of the Head's responsibilities.

### **2.3 Unit Organisation**

The unit operates as one with a single line manager in the form of the Head of School. Many tasks and responsibilities are however devolved to staff on an ad-hoc basis with some rotation of duties. These include programme directors, Erasmus and membership of various institutional committees, none of which attract additional remuneration. There are four senior technicians who manage the laboratories on a day to day basis and similarly there are two senior demonstrators,.

### **3 Mission, Strategic Planning, Organisation and Management of the Unit**

The PRG found the unit to be well managed and enthusiastic about its future. The school has a well thought out ambitious strategic plan which aligns well with that of the institution. The rapid growth of the department to date and the requirement to grow further to meet its ambitions are recognised to require a reduction in the reliance on one individual to provide all leadership and management. Considering the risks involved it is now time for the school to look at ways to provide for a more formal sharing of management responsibilities by creating an appropriate management structure within the school. This arrangement should take into account the cyclical nature of Head of School appointments which may result in a change of personnel within the life of the strategic plan.

#### **3.1 Commendations**

The PRG commends the following:

- i. This relatively new academic unit has come a long way in a short time and has a clear, well developed set of objectives which will consolidate their position nationally and internationally.
- ii. Evidence of strong leadership and the School has been managed very effectively to date.
- iii. The School's plans which align well with those of the RCSI.
- iv. The significant success which the school has enjoyed in obtaining nationally competitive contracts.

#### **3.2 Recommendations**

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. The School's plans for expansion are appropriate, but the School should review its resource requirements before committing to significant increases in student numbers.
- ii. Extend the implementation plan to at least five years and updated annually.
- iii. The current management infrastructure should be reviewed in order to provide greater support to the Head of School, given the significant growth of the School.
- iv. The School should engage in a work force planning exercise to map the current work load allocation and identify methods by which this could be streamlined, whilst maintaining the high standards evident within the School.

## 4 Staff and Facilities

The PRG were impressed by the enthusiasm with which the staff engaged in the review process and the strength of support for the Head of School. It is clear that the school has come a long way in a short time and staff still retain the energy and enthusiasm often associated with a rapid growth phase but there is a danger that this will fade unless the workload is better matched to resources. The PRG were impressed by many of the laboratories and clearly there has been a significant investment to ensure that the school can deliver its commitments. There was some concern expressed that space, particularly for research labs and staff accommodation, was not currently suitable and in view of the projected growth of the school is an issue to be resolved. Therefore, there is a need to review current research facilities and office accommodation. Many but not all staff are research active and plans are in place to encourage and support growth and development among staff, but in order to sustain this, there is a need for equitable work load planning but without a work load model this is impossible. Staff Training is available but there are opportunities to strengthen its provision, particularly in time management, communications, project planning, stress management and leadership with a view to improving the ability of all staff to manage their demanding workload effectively.

### 4.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- i. The Head of School, who is also strongly commended by the staff
- ii. The real sense of team work and genuine collegiality among the staff.
- iii. Staff bring a wealth and breadth of expertise in terms of the needs of the students, research development and pharmacy practice as a whole.
- iv. Evidence of significant contribution to the “service” of RCSI. Staff are very involved in a wide range of activities within the School and the college.
- v. Staff are actively involved in national and international groups enabling them to anticipate future education and research needs of the School.

### 4.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Review the current office space, giving consideration to the stated desire by the team that all staff be located within the one area.
- ii. Review the teaching space in anticipation of the School expansion to optimise its utilisation and ensure that it continues to provide a high quality student experience.
- iii. Review current research accommodation to ensure that it continues to be appropriate for the delivery of high quality research and for attracting high quality research active faculty.
- iv. Develop a systematic approach to staff engagement with the new HPEC in order to maximise the significant opportunities for educational development.
- v. Standardise the training in teaching and demonstration currently provided and make it mandatory for all PhD scholars. This will maintain consistency in approach and adherence to the excellent standards already in existence in the School.
- vi. Review IT facilities in professional teaching labs in order to optimise student learning opportunities.

## 5 Quality Assurance

The School appears to have managed the Quality Review Process effectively and there is evidence that the experience will result in sustainable changes to the way staff approach their duties. Quality Assurance processes are in place and a very effective module feedback system enable all concerned to monitor and continually improve quality in the classroom. The PRG was impressed by the enthusiasm for quality which permeated all meetings and indeed process examined during the review. The Quality Team formed for the purpose of the self-assessment conducted their task very effectively and the Self-Assessment Report had a reassuring level of self-critical appraisal and reflection. For the future, the PRG would encourage the School to place the matter of QA and QI projects on the agenda of all department meetings and to maintain a Quality Team with a strong leader, who is not the Head of School, for the purpose of pursuing these projects.

### 5.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- i. The School has developed a strong quality ethos which is apparent throughout their activities.
- ii. Staff are very engaged with the quality assurance processes within the College and there is a growing culture of continuous quality improvement.
- iii. The School has enthusiastically engaged with the student feedback surveys and have developed a simple but effective QIP system to ensure that issues are addressed openly and transparently.
- iv. Students respond well to feedback surveys and results reflect well on the School.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Continue to develop the strong quality ethos in the School.
- ii. Consider creation of a role within the School to lead quality initiatives.

## 6 Curriculum Development, Teaching, Learning and Student Feedback

In addition to setting a new MPharm degree the relatively new school has been actively developing new programmes since its establishment. This demanding schedule has resulted in programmes that are accredited and appear to be successfully meeting the needs of the market, both locally and internationally. The school has established links to industry and these and other partnerships have contributed to the growth of the school's reputation in both teaching and research. The PRG met a small group of students representing the undergraduate degree, pre-registration year, post-graduate taught course and postgraduate research. Students were largely positive about their programmes, facilities and teaching staff and there was evidence that faculty responded positively to their feedback. The review would have benefitted from more students from each course in order to have gained a more rounded view of the student experience. The PRG was impressed by the student feedback mechanisms, run by the Quality Enhancement Office, and the way the results were presented to both staff and students.

### 6.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- i. There is a motivated, dedicated and enthusiastic staff, committed to providing a high quality student experience.
- ii. Programmes are outcomes focussed, practical in nature and constantly evolving in anticipation of the changing professional landscape.
- iii. The staff engage actively and regularly in curriculum review and there is evidence of excellent systemic responsiveness to reviews of programmes and of recommendations for future developments.
- iv. The work of the staff in the redevelopment of the MPharm programme is highly commendable.
- v. The engagement with all stakeholders in ensuring that the new integrated MPharm programme curriculum will be fit for purpose, is impressive.

### 6.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Consider establishing a lead role in education planning, from within the School, to enhance linkages and cross fertilisation across and between programmes and modules.
- ii. Encourage staff with curriculum development responsibilities, to look outside the profession of pharmacy and at pharmacy education abroad to learn from the experience of others.
- iii. Utilise the current optional peer observation process to effectively support new staff and enhance the performance of current staff.
- iv. Encourage and support requests for sabbaticals for staff that need to update the currency of their knowledge.
- v. Increase the use of feedback/feedforward as this is an important priority for students.
- vi. Blue-printing of assessment should be reviewed and systemised to ensure continued alignment between assessment and module/programmatic learning outcomes.
- vii. Exploit the excellent engagement with external stakeholders to discuss the timing and placement of the experiential learning experiences to ensure sustainability.



## 7 Research Activity

Despite its relative infancy, the school has already established a vibrant research community with breadth and depth in its external collaborations. There is significant evidence of research success and this continues to improve as the school matures. The development of four research pillars is useful for providing external identity and a research focus within the school itself. There are clear differences with respect to success and activity in the four pillars and recognition of this is helpful when identifying where resources and support should be provided at present and in the future. There are a good range of research facilities however the quality of these is variable. Furthermore, despite relatively cramped conditions, there are plans for further expansion. Expansion will therefore require careful management to ensure that the new facilities continue to support the high quality research. Research is critical to maintaining the school's growing reputation and this is recognised as a priority in their strategic plans.

### 7.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- i. Impressive research success with respect to publications and grants which is on an upwards trajectory in line with the School's strategic aims.
- ii. Extensive collaborations from within and outside of the college strongly underpinning the School's research endeavour.
- iii. Development of four pillars which provide a clear external identity with respect to the School's research focus.
- iv. Excellent management and organisation of undergraduate research projects resulting in impressive outputs.

### 7.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Consider the current research governance processes within the School to enhance effective communication of expectations and the research culture. This should include mentoring, seminars, internal peer review and strategic management of applications for seed funding.
- ii. Consider the strategic utilisation of sabbaticals to enhance research capacity and collaborations.
- iii. Consideration should be given to supporting relevant staff to engage more actively in education research which may complement their specific focus area within the School.

## 8 External Relations

The school has developed successful partnerships and working relationships with professional organisations, other academic institutions in Ireland and overseas, with the health care providers and with manufacturing industry. Arrangements are in place to support and engage external partners and the PRG was impressed by feedback from these partners during the review. These partnerships are an important part of the school's growth and establishment plans and the school has plans to develop more of these in order to provide a stable platform for development of future markets. Efforts to develop a strong Alumni network have not reached full potential and administrative challenges need to be overcome in order to exploit this opportunity. The PRG noted that the school enjoys very strong positive relationships within the RCSI Schools and Departments.

### 8.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- i. Strong partnerships with academia, community, hospital and industry stakeholders.
- ii. Stakeholders are actively engaged in curriculum development and design.
- iii. There is evidence of clear alignment with National Body requirements.
- iv. International partnerships in US and EU.
- v. Excellent relationships between the RCSI Schools and Departments.
- vi. There is effective MPharm tutor training and engagement.

### 8.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Further develop Alumni opportunities.
- ii. Scope and engage more clinical sites for experiential learning opportunities.

## 9 Support Services

The PRG met with a range of support service providers and were impressed by their enthusiasm and professionalism. RCSI clearly has a strong and caring support system which provides for student welfare and careers support and pharmacy students benefit from this suite of facilities. Infrastructural services such as the Library, IT etc all appeared to be more than adequate but it was difficult to understand why some students were given two laptops during their programme whereas others were only given one. It seems to the panel that provision of services to students should be consistent across the full range of programmes, at all levels.

### 9.1 Commendations

The PRG commends the following:

- iii. Career opportunities for students are prioritised by the School and active collaboration with the Career Development Manager is evident.
- iv. The strong and highly supportive student affairs team which proactively engages well with the students and staff thus providing a comprehensive range of support services.
- v. The open-door policy which has to date proven very successful.
- vi. The clearly structured range of support services which are well-used and valued by students. These services include Library, IT, SARA and Student Services, among others.
- vii. Many of the support services are part of a wider network which has local representation in the School, thus providing students with easy access.

### 9.2 Recommendations

The PRG recommends the following:

- i. Periodically review student needs and aspirations identified in the ISSE and other surveys in order to ensure an optimal match between supply and demand.
- ii. Engage with the language and cultural support team early in the recruitment process to enhance international student induction into the programme(s).
- iii. Review student laptop provision policies to ensure consistency across the whole college.