SUMMARY OF THE PERIODIC REVIEW OF DEGREES IN INTERNATIONAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Programmes covered by the Periodic Review
   - MA Social Development and Sustainable Livelihoods
   - MSc Applied Development Studies
   - MSc Communication for Sustainable Livelihoods
   - MSc Development Finance
   - MSc Development Projects: Management and Implementation
   - MSc Education and Training for Development
   - MSc Environment and Development
   - MSc Extension for Natural Resource Based Livelihoods

2. Date of the Periodic Review
   The Review took place on 16 and 17 March 2004.

3. Objectives of the Periodic Review
   The objectives of the Review were to:
   - Monitor the quality and standards of the degree programmes under review;
   - Enable the Department of International and Rural Development (IRDD) to evaluate its taught programme provision, particularly student achievement of the appropriate academic standards, and the learning opportunities offered to students;
   - Enable an independent Panel to review this self-evaluation through consideration of documentation and discussions with staff and students;
   - Provide a means by which the Department could reflect on the success, development and possible improvement of its taught programmes;
   - Ask fundamental questions about the rationale, structure and resourcing of the programmes under review;
   - Consider the educational aims and objectives of the programmes;
   - Review teaching, learning and methods of assessment in their contexts;
   - Consider whether the programmes under review should continue to run for a further period of up to six years.

4. Conduct of the Periodic Review
   The Review was conducted by a Panel chaired by the Head of the School of Health and Social Care. The Panel was also comprised of two other internal members of academic staff (neither from the Department of International and Rural Development) and one external academic member from the Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, University College Dublin.

   The Panel received a range of documentation in advance of the Review, including a Self-Evaluation Document prepared by the Department and relevant programme specifications. During the Review visit, the Panel considered other documentation and met relevant staff from the Department. The Panel also met current students studying on all the degree programmes under review.

5. Evidence base
   In addition to meetings held with academic staff and current students the Panel considered a wide range of evidence, including examples of student work with staff feedback, copies of programme handbooks, minutes of relevant committees and statistical data. The Panel were able to see External Examiners reports for the three previous years and were satisfied that these had been
responded to appropriately. Prior to the Review visit the Panel requested additional information on the English language support available to overseas students and this was provided promptly. The Panel was also able to see the evaluation questionnaires produced by students.

6. **External peer contributors to process**
The external member of the Panel was present for the duration of the Review visit. He was appointed by the Faculty of Life Sciences Board for Teaching and Learning after it had considered nominations from the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development (of which IRDD is part). The appointment of one external member (as opposed to the normal two external members) was agreed by the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning. The role of the external member was to provide subject expertise and to provide an expert judgement of the validity and appropriateness of the programmes under review.

7. **Overview of the main characteristics of the programmes covered by the review**
IRDD operates a large number of closely interlocking programmes. The Panel accepted that this variety of programme titles was required for marketing purposes but felt that it might need to be reviewed in the light of student demand and staff workload. There is good linkage between staff research and consultancy and the content of modules. The Panel were impressed by the strength of demand shown by applications to the programmes under review and were particularly pleased by the good conversion rate of applicants to entrants. The very high admission rate of non-EU students is an important feature to note – both in terms of income generation and the way it strengthens the external image of Reading in the developing world.

8. **Conclusions on innovation and good practice**
Examples of innovation and good practice identified by the Panel included:

- Evidence of high levels of staff involvement in dissertation supervision, both in terms of content and the level of English for non-native English speakers. However, the Panel was concerned that such a heavy investment of time might not be sustainable;
- Effective partnership with FESS in the delivery of modules that are valued by students;
- The Annual Academic Review of programmes has a holistic approach and ensures that programmes remain current;
- Recruitment and selection of students demonstrates considerable staff effort. Information is available in a range of sources (eg Internet, email, applicant guides, personal contact, professional networks). Students commented favourably on the speedy response to their queries and applications on the flexibility shown by the Faculty Office.

9. **Conclusions on quality and standards**
The Panel concluded:

- That the intended learning outcomes of the programmes were clear and appropriate and that students were achieving them;
- That quality and standards on the programmes were satisfactory;
- That the quality of dissertations was comparable to similar masters programmes in other institutions;
- That a high level of English language support was available to students who did not have English as a first language;
- That the programme specifications were being delivered.

10. **Conclusions on currency and validity of the programmes under review**
The Panel concluded that the programmes under review remained current and valid. They were impressed by the close linkage between the teaching, research and consultancy interests of staff. This gave credibility to the teaching and was appreciated by the students. The Panel recommended that all the following programmes should be **re-approved** to run for a further six
years, or until such time as the next Periodic Review of programmes in International and Rural Development:

- MA Social Development and Sustainable Livelihoods
- MSc Applied Development Studies
- MSc Communication for Sustainable Livelihoods
- MSc Development Finance
- MSc Development Projects: Management and Implementation
- MSc Education and Training for Development
- MSc Environment and Development
- MSc Extension for Natural Resource Based Livelihoods

The University Board for Teaching and Learning approved these recommendations on 10 June 2004.

11. Recommendations

The Department of International and Rural Development was asked to address the following issues:

11.1. Necessary

The Panel found no issues under this heading

11.2. Advisable

- The Department should fully implement its policy on the peer review of teaching. In particular, the Department should ensure that written records are kept of the review process;
- The Dept should develop and implement a system for the moderation of module marks. This would not necessarily involve the double-marking of all modules, but could include double-marking a sample of modules each session;
- Where assessments have been double marked and a discrepancy in marks has arisen, these should be harmonised between internal examiners and an agreed mark forwarded to the external examiner;
- The Department should review the range of assessment methods used on its modules. In particular the Department should consider whether or not a module can be satisfactorily assessed by one 2500 word assignment alone;
- In the case of modules taught by FESS but with IRDD coding, the Department should consider either revising their coding or providing greater information to students to make clear that the modules are taught outside the Department. This would also involve clarification of their external examination;
- Summaries of module evaluation questionnaires should be considered by the Board of Studies;
- Minutes of the Board of Studies and the Department Teaching and Learning Committee should be produced according to the Faculty Guidelines for Boards of Studies.

11.3. Desirable

- The Department should develop a firm plan for the future of the Documentation Centre. This is likely to involve greater use of electronic storage of information;
- Student handbooks should include greater advice on module selection, in particular covering the following points:
  - Requirements for the award of a Masters degree – specifying that up to 30 credits may be taken below M level
  - More information on modules taught outside the Department
- Making students aware that foreign languages (other than English for non-native speakers) are available as option modules
  - The Department should consider including assessment deadlines in module descriptors.

12. Summary of actions taken in response to the review
The Department of International and Rural Development is considering the issues raised as follows:

12.1 Advisable issues
- During the 2004-2005 academic year, the Department will fully implement peer review of teaching, ensuring that written records are kept
- During the 2004-2005 academic year, the Department will extend its present system of moderation and will seek guidance and review from the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development Committee for Teaching and Learning
- The Department will move to harmonise module marks between internal examiners during the 2004-2005 academic year
- The Department will review its assessment methods in consultation with the School Committee for Teaching and Learning during the 2004-2005 academic year
- The Department will review the options regarding coding for modules taught externally during the 2004-2005 academic year
- During the 2004-2005 academic year, the Department will ensure that summaries of module evaluation questionnaires are considered by Board of Studies
- The Department will review its procedures for producing Boards of Studies and Department Teaching and Learning Committee minutes in the light of relevant Faculty Guidelines during the 2004-2005 academic year

12.2 Desirable issues
- The Department is to begin planning for the future of its Documentation Centre during the 2004-2005 academic year, seeing this as an important and necessary task
- The Department is to seek improvements to its student Handbooks for 2004-2005 in the areas identified by the Review Panel
- The Department is to examine the feasibility of including this information on assessment deadlines in its module descriptors during the 2004-2005 academic year