

Internal Academic Review Committee
Common Themes Arising from the Reviews of the
Basic Health Sciences Departments

With the Departments comprising the Basic Health Sciences group scheduled for review under the Internal Academic Review process during the 2001 - 2002 cycle, the preliminary question of whether they should be examined as individual units, or be looked at together, was considered. The question arose in the first place because it was recognized that among them, the units share extensive joint activities in both teaching and research. Moreover, the boundaries among the subject areas are becoming increasingly blurred as more collaboration and integration occurs across the disciplines. While it is widely acknowledged that the boundaries are fluid, nevertheless, at the national and international levels there are distinctive communities associated with the traditional disciplinary lines. Furthermore, obtaining the perspective of area-specific external consultants was thought to be desirable for review purposes. Therefore, it was decided to carry out a separate review on each of the five component units of the Basic Health Sciences group.

As the IARC studied the submissions that were received for the Departments of Anatomy & Cell Biology, Biochemistry, Microbiology & Immunology, Pharmacology & Toxicology and Physiology, it was noted that a number of shared themes and strengths, as well as common issues and areas of concern had been recognized and highlighted by both the external consultants and the University Review Teams. The IARC also noted

the considerable integration and cooperation, along with natural commonalities, that exist among these disciplines in both teaching and research. In the circumstances, the IARC determined that the common concerns should be clearly communicated to Senate and further, that a common approach to resolving some of these issues should be recommended. Therefore, the IARC is presenting to Senate one comprehensive submission, which speaks to common issues among the five units, in addition to a separate and distinct report on each Department.

In this inclusive submission the IARC is recommending in the broadest sense that the five Basic Health Sciences Departments make focused efforts to move toward collective thinking and integrated processes in a number of important areas. The recommendation to take an integrated approach to these issues is not simply a reaction to a near-term problem or in response to obvious budgetary pressures, but is being made for sound academic reasons and in consideration of the way that these disciplines are evolving.

Major Recommendations:

1. BUDGET AND STAFFING PLANS: The issue of the need for renewal in the faculty complement, as well as on the administrative/support and technical staff side was a feature of the reviews of every one of these Departments. With regard to faculty, it was noted that many of the Departments will have a number of retirements in the near future and are otherwise facing various challenges in connection with the hiring of new faculty, including issues of gender balance. The Departments have been able to make strategic

use of Canada Research Chair appointments as a partial response to some of their staffing issues. Budget constraints, however, along with the projected retirements, make the departments and some programs potentially vulnerable. Budget cuts have eroded both numbers and morale among the support and technical staff.

The IARC recommends that the Basic Health Sciences Departments work together to explore and exploit opportunities for collaborative strategies and solutions to the staffing challenges they are currently facing. Such collaboration could occur, for example, through the development of strategic hiring plans, the pooling of resources, or administrative mergers.

2. UNDERGRADUATE LABORATORIES: The undergraduate Life Sciences Program at Queen's University enjoys an excellent reputation; however, there is currently enormous pressure on the laboratories that are housed in the Basic Health Sciences Departments and used for the delivery of that program. Interim measures have been used to support the operation of the laboratories as the program has faced increasing enrolments and general budgetary difficulties, but long-term solutions are necessary to avoid more serious effects on the quality and quantity of the laboratory experience for Life Sciences students. The IARC recognizes that resolving this issue is more challenging because of the complexities of the involvement of both the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Faculty of Health Sciences in the Life Sciences program.

The IARC recommends that the five Basic Health Sciences Departments conduct an appraisal of the laboratory curriculum of the Life Sciences program and explore the

possibility of an integrated approach in order to preserve and enhance the unique laboratory experiences that are an integral part of this program.

3. GRADUATE PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH: The Basic Health Sciences

Departments have made great strides in creating a number of novel integrated research programs and have been very successful in attracting considerable external funding for both research and graduate training. However, a common area of concern noted in the submissions was the need for greater and more diverse graduate student enrolment. Many of the Departments recruit their Masters students directly from the Queen's Life Sciences program. There is a need to recruit nationally and internationally in order to enhance graduate enrolment, particularly at the PhD level. Indeed, there should be greater opportunity to attract additional PhD students as increasingly both research and to a large extent graduate programs are reorganized around research themes rather than disciplinary lines.

The IARC recommends that the Basic Health Sciences Departments continue to look at ways to build on their research strengths, including support of interdisciplinary and theme-centred efforts as well as interdepartmental initiatives. Furthermore, the IARC recommends that the Departments work together to develop a strategy for the recruitment of graduate students that would have a greater reach at both the national and international levels.

Outcomes of the Review:

The following response was submitted by the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and presented at the Ba

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place in the annual budget and staffing strategy meetings between the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Vice-Principal (Academic).