Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Programme for Administrative Units

2004-2005

Peer Review Group Report
for the
Office of the Vice President for Research

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Introduction

This Quality review has been conducted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and which complies with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997). The model consists of a number of basic steps.

1. An internal team in the Unit being reviewed completes a detailed self-assessment report (SAR). It should be noted that this document is confidential to the Unit and to the Review Panel and to senior officers of the University

2. This report is sent to a team of peer assessors, the Peer Review Group (PRG) – composed of members from outside DCU and from other areas of DCU – who then visit the Unit and conduct discussions with a range of staff, students and other stakeholders.

3. The PRG then writes its own report.

4. The Unit produces a response, in response to the various issues and findings of the SAR and PRG Reports.

5. The PRG Report and the Unit response are then considered at a meeting of the relevant Senior Management of the University (Deputy President, relevant Vice-President etc.) who address recommendations in the Peer Review Group Report, that fall outside the control of the Unit or that require additional resources. Arising from this meeting, Unit- and University-based action plans are approved. Together, these are termed the Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP)

6. A summary of the Quality Review is sent to the Governing Authority of the University, who may approve publication in a manner that they see fit. Following the approval of the summary report by the Governing Authority, it is published on the University website. The full text of the Peer Review Group Report and the Quality Improvement Plan is also published on the Quality Promotion Unit website.

- **This document is the report referred to in Step 3 above.**

1. Profile of the Office of the Vice President for Research

1.1 Location of the Unit

The OVPR is located on the ground floor of the Postgraduate Residences block on the southwest extremity of the campus. The OVPR has a suite of four offices (100m^2 of space).

This office space is fully occupied with no additional space available in the building for any expansion in the unit.

1.2 Staff

	Name	Grade	Years at Grade	Years at DCU	OVPR Start date	Responsibilities
1	Prof. Eugene Kennedy	Professor	18	25	Dec 04	Vice-President for Research
2	Dr. Declan Raftery	Administrator III	1 year	7 years	Dec 03	Director of Research Support Services
3	Ms. Kaylene Atkinson	Administrator I	2 years	2 years	Jan 03	Research Officer
4	Ms. Mary Adsley	Grade V	4 years	6 years	Sep 03	Research Officer
5	Ms. Fiona Brennan	Grade V	4 mths	4 ½ years	Oct 04	Research Officer
6	Ms. Fiona Lyons	Grade II	1 year	1 year	Feb 04	Secretary
7	n/a	Grade V	n/a	n/a		New Research Officer – to be appointed

Kaylene Atkinson has recently returned home to Australia.

1.3 Product / Processes

The mission of the OVPR is:

To proactively help in' **building and sustaining research excellence** *at DCU.'*

The OVPR carries out this mission by:

- Formulating, communicating and implementing research strategies and policies on behalf of the University.
- Representing research interests in decision-making on appropriate external bodies and maintaining active liaison with external funding agencies.
- Developing quality care procedures for the university's research effort
- Establishing, implementing and evaluating research promotion initiatives.
- Developing the physical and organizational research infrastructure at DCU

The OVPR works closely with the faculties, schools, research centres, individual researchers and university support units in carrying out its mission.

As part of the process of delivering on that vision, the OVPR interacts particularly strongly with and provides administrative support to three groups specifically established by the university executive to support research: the Research Committee, the Research Advisory Panel (RAP) and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) The OVPR also liaises with central university support units in its efforts to develop the overall infrastructural support for research at DCU.

2. The Self-Assessment Process

2.1 The Co-ordinating Committee

Prof. Eugene Kennedy	Vice-President for Research
Ms. Mary Adsley	Research Officer (Grade V)
Ms. Kaylene Atkinson	Research Officer (Administrator I)
Ms. Fiona Brennan	Research Officer (Grade V)
Dr. Declan Raftery	Director (Administrator III - Chair)
Ms. Fiona Lyons	Secretary (participated in a number of meetings and the quality away day)

2.2 Methodology Adopted

Allocation of Tasks:
The OVPR Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and online questionnaire were prepared collectively by the OVPR staff members with individuals being allocated a section of the SAR to draft. Throughout the process the latest draft copy of the SAR was available on the OVPR intranet shared drive for all staff members to review, comment upon and amend. The final version of the SAR that was submitted to the DCU Quality Promotion Unit was approved by all of the staff members in the unit. Two members of staff from the OVPR participated in each focus group and every members of the coordinating committee chaired one focus group meeting.

Report Preparation Methodology:
The following meetings were held as part of the process of developing the Self Assessment Report:

- September 16th 2004   Half-day Planning and Analysis meeting
- Staff Survey   An anonymous all staff electronic questionnaire was posted for the period 1st – 10th December 2004 and 118 responses were recorded and analysed.
- Dec 16th 2004   Staff meeting 2-4pm
- Jan 6th 2005   Full day meeting off campus
- Week beginning Jan 10th   Focus Group meetings were held with:
    i. Theme Leaders and Associate Deans for Research
    ii. Central Administration Units
    iii. Faculty Administrators
    iv. Emerging Researchers
    v. Established Researchers
- Jan 18th 2005   Review of Draft SAR
- Jan 21st 2005   Review of Draft SAR
- Jan 28th 2005   Review and approval version of final version of

3. The Peer Review Group Process

<u>3.1 Site Visit Programme</u>

Wednesday, 23 February 2005

14.00 – 15.30	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion.
15.30 – 16.00	Group selected Chair and agreed final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days
16.00 – 17.30	Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with Unit Quality Committee (including a short 20 minute presentation from OVPR)
19.30	Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Director of Quality Promotion and Unit Quality Co-ordinating Committee

Thursday, 24 February 2005

09.00 – 10.30	Meeting of the PRG for further consideration of Self-Assessment Report
10.30-11.0	PRG met with Director of Quality Promotion to clarify Terms of Reference of the Review
11.15-12.15	PRG group met with VPR
12.15- 13.00	PRG met with Director RSS
13.00 – 14.00	Over lunch the members of Peer Review Group met with Chair and Deputy Chair of RAP and Chair of Research Ethics Committee
14.15 – 17.30	Meetings with representative selections of stakeholders

- Researchers
- Associate Deans for Research
- Central Support Units – Finance, HR and Library
- Directors of National Centres

17.30 – 18.30	Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day
19.30	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group

Friday, 25 February 2005

09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with President, Deputy-President, Secretary, Director of Finance and Director of Human Resources (Director of Quality Promotion in attendance)
09.45-10.15	Tour of Campus and offices of VPR
10.15-11.30	Meeting with Director and Operations Manager of INVENT (IP/ commercialisation)
11.30 – 12.30	Meeting followed by working lunch for members of Peer Review Group
12.30 – 15.30	Preparation of 1st Draft of Final Report
15.40 – 16.10	Exit presentation to <u>ALL</u> staff of the Unit made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group

3.2 Methodology

The nature of the review meant that the full PRG reviewed all aspects of the review and attended all sessions.

The site visit began at 14:00 on Wednesday 23rd 2005 with a briefing by the Director of Quality promotion. The group elected Prof. Vincent Cunnane as the chair of the PRG. Ms Ursula Baxter of DCU acted a rapporteur for the group as well as her role as a full member of the review group. Due to the nature of this unit it was decided to address all issues in a cohesive way rather than subdividing the tasks.

3.3 Overview

After an initial discussion among the PRG, the OVPR unit's quality committee outlined their role with a brief presentation. Later that evening an informal dinner provided an opportunity for the PRG (with the exception of Prof. Whelan who was unable to attend) and the OVPR to discuss general issues in a general way.

It was clear from the PRG discussions on day 2 that some additional clarity was needed on the brief. While the OVPR is a small unit, its impact across the university as a whole is significant and therefore the issues raised could stray into more general strategic issues relating to the university as a whole. A meeting with the Director of the QPU was requested and he promptly attended at 10:30. It was clear from this meeting that the Director of the QPU felt the issues relating to such strategic issues did fall within the broader remit of the PRG. The PRG proceeded on this basis. In addition the PRG asked that the meeting with the RAP chair / past chair and REC chair be brought forward from Day 3 to the 13:00 session. These members kindly accommodated the PRG with this change.

Following discussion with the Director of the QPU, the PRG proceeded to meet again with Prof. Kennedy and Dr. Raftery on an individual basis to reflect in more detail on some of the issues raised in the self assessment document. The tour of the OVPR facilities was rescheduled for day 3. At 13:00 the PRG met with the chairs of RAP and REC. In light of the move from a school-based system to an executive facility system the PRG were keen to see how RAP saw itself. It was clear from the current and previous chairs of RAP that this grouping was one in which they had significant enthusiasm and faith and the PRG found this discussion useful in helping frame some of its final recommendations.

After this working lunch the PRG met with a range of stakeholders in the university. This included a representative group of researchers, 3 of the 4 appointed faculty based associated deans for research (unfortunately no theme leader was available – the PRG regret this as they would have found their perspective on the OVPR as useful), senior central support unit representatives from Finance, HR, and the Library (the director of CSD was unable to attend at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances) and two National centre directors (NCSR, NICB). The PRG found these meetings extremely useful and was surprised with the degree of unanimity expressed at these meetings. The PRG then reformed in private to discuss issues that had arisen to date and to outline key aspects that it needed to address in day 3. The PRG continued this discussion over a working dinner later that evening.

The PRG regrouped at 8:30 on Day 3 to review its briefing to the senior management group. This meeting took place at 9:00, during which the PRG presented a detailed outline of the issues raised in light of the expanded brief. Following this constructive meeting the PRG visited the OVPR facilities. A brief tour of the campus followed as

the team moved to INVENT for it's meeting with Dr Tony Glynn and Ron Immink. The PRG then reformed in its base office to plan the format and content of its draft submission. The team then prepared the draft document. The day concluded with an informal exit presentation, which began at 15:40. While some of the meetings ran over time, this was unavoidable due to the broad remit of this review. While we made some minor changes to the timetable, the original timetable was well planned. The flexibility of the OVPR and DCU staff in general in the minor delays and rescheduling was both useful and appreciated. All those participating in the meetings, OVPR and DCU staff in general, engaged very effectively with the process. The role of the OVPR is key to the University and this was clearly demonstrated by the willingness of staff to provided constructive feedback into the OVPR.

3.4 Overall Comments on the Visit

The OVPR self assessment document and associated material was sent out to all PRG members well in advance of the site visit giving the reviewers ample time to assess the content. Additional support materials were provided on request in a timely manner. Liaison provided by both the QPU and the OVPR was excellent.

The timetable was very intense. Due to the nature of the unit under review and its cross-university responsibilities the review was significantly different to a Faculty based review. More consideration of the timetable should be given in the next similar unit review undertaken in the university. The PRG found it necessary to bring forward one scheduled meeting from the third to the second day

3.5 Review Group's view of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG felt that the Self-Assessment Report was a very reflective work, prepared with candour. It included a comprehensive SWOT analysis. The Group did feel there was one omission – consideration of the research continuum from post graduate students and technology transfer - it was not explained where these functions sit and the relationship of OVPR with postgraduate students was unclear. There was enough information in the form of Appendices, which included the very comprehensive questionnaire issued by the OVPR as part of the SAR. Additionally the PRG requested a full list of the members of the Research Committee and the Research Advisory Panel, which was immediately provided by the OVPR staff; and Budget Financial details which the Director of Quality Promotion provided

3.6 Report Methodology

The report content was discussed in detail by the PRG prior to the drafting process. Once the team were clear on the issues they wished to raise, allocation of the mechanical aspects of producing the first draft were allocated equally among the team.

The report was prepared by the PRG after review of the SAR and Appendices and meeting with the various stakeholders on the Thursday afternoon. It was informed by meeting with all the Senior Management of the University on the Friday morning and key considerations around the EUA Report, the Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities and knowledge of the OECD Report and the Bologna Accord.

4. Findings of the Review Group

4.1 Background and Context

The Office of the Vice-President for Research (OVPR) was established in 2002 in response to the growing importance of research in the mission of DCU. The OVPR has evolved considerably in terms of functions, activities and resources over the last two years and currently has a staff complement of six with a seventh post (new Grade V Research Officer) advertised for in late January 2005

4.2 Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

It was clear to the Group from the visit to the offices of the VPR that the staff's concerns about space were well justified.

4.3 Functions, Activities and Processes

The OVPR is the key component in the research support infrastructure at DCU. It is the point of focus for all the other administrative functions including CSD, Library, HR and Finance in particular that interact with the research community. There are two main functions that the OVPR addresses, these being at the operational and at the strategic levels.

It was clear from our interaction with the various stakeholders (research community, associate deans of research, national centre directors, senior staff in support units, senior management committee and INVENT) in DCU that they are very happy with the service and responsiveness of the OVPR operational unit. The Director of the Research Support Services (RSS) was specifically singled out for praise in the role he had to take on during the recent change of VPR. It is clear that at an operational level the OVPR works very well, although the lack of staff and corporate memory makes this very vulnerable. While the VPR is new to the post it is clear there is significant goodwill by the stakeholders to the VPR, who in the main would like to see him as their champion. This augurs well for the future if the strategic element of the OVPR can duplicate the success at operational level.

The role of the VPR should be mainly strategic and not operational. The role obviously embraces both functions but it has become identified, in the eyes of the general research community with the operational requirements of the University. There is a need to bring clarity to the role of the VPR. The recent appointment of a Director of RSS allows such clarity and allows the VPR to engage with strategic issues.

5. Recommendations for Improvement

The PRG recommendations are laid out below. Each is given a priority. The meaning of the priority indicators is as follows:
- P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.
- P2: A recommendation that is important, but can (or perhaps must) be addressed on a more extended timescale.
- P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the Unit.

Additionally, the PRG has attempted to indicate the level(s) of the University where action is required:

- A: Administrative Unit
- U: University Executive/Senior Management

Where considered appropriate, action at multiple levels is recommended: this should be considered as inclusive, indicating a need for co-ordinated, complementary, actions at *all* the indicated levels (rather than, e.g., at "any one level").

1. Support the sustainable development of the OVPR

Review infrastructural needs of this key unit: The office has essentially no room to develop in its present location. It has no dedicated meeting space. The office may well be located at too peripheral a location from the main research community.

Succession planning – vulnerable to key staff changes: Need to have written SOPs covering the roles of the Director and the support staff. These would assist in training new staff but would also give some comfort for business continuity planning

The OVPR need time to reflect rather than fire fight. As part of its role it should be seen to encourage and enable Research staff to be seconded to roles in funding bodies. It should also be seen to protect and grow the percentage of the core budget allocated to Research

- *Define more clearly the key, unique roles of the OVPR with respect to the university's mission (P2U)*
- *Improve the robustness of the OVPR, alleviating its vulnerability to staff changes. (P1A)*
- *Meet justified expansion of staff complement to achieve the mission of the OVPR effectively (P2U)*
- *Address the issue of the limitations of the accommodation of the unit to increase its effectiveness (P2U)*

2. Bring greater clarity to the role of the OVPR.

The role of the VPR should be largely strategic and not operational. The VPR should be interacting at a very high level with the research agencies (national and international) and industry. The VPR should drive their external relationship and champion the DCU research effort.

It is clear that the VPR is key in the development of the next strategic plan. However there is a lack of clarity on the development of a research strategy and the various committees responsible for the development of the RS. There is also a clear need for the VPR to be fully briefed and indeed to be part of the special project initiatives run by the SPU.

Whilst the OVPR has a clear brief in dealing with research support there is a need to ensure that the postgraduate effort and postgraduate community (the primary resource for research endeavour and output) is formally developed and linked to the OVPR. Consideration should be given to the development of a new role of Dean for Graduate Studies.

It is imperative that the new administrative structures based around executive faculties and theme leaders are given clear roles in a wider university context. Clarity

is essential in bringing the new (ADRs, theme leaders and executive deans) and more established (RC and RAP) research structures together in a coherent way.

Research Committee RC: There is a need to reaffirm the prime role of the RC as the strategic body for research policy in DCU

RAP: A review of the role of the RAP Committee is recommended. It is clear that this panel will not be the main advisory group on research in the future. It may well be considered that its role in the allocation of elements of the research budget should continue and that the very positive aspects of the interaction between the Science and Technology and Humanities and Business faculties be continued. The very positive role in bringing younger researchers into research administration is also a factor to consider.

It is clear that INVENT fulfils a number of roles on campus with both direct university involvement and areas which are considered purely commercial and operated outside of university considerations. In the main, the operation of the OVPR in respect to the university aspects of INVENT's role is operationally effective.

- *Reaffirm the prime role of RC (and the VPR as Chair)(P1U)*

- *Establish, say, a Strategy Implementation Sub-committee (SISC) of the RC to include the Faculty Associate Deans of Research (connecting in the Faculty Research Committees and their activities to the RC) and/or Executive Deans, plus the Theme Leaders, and the Heads of the National Centres to more effectively bridge research strategy, policy and operations at DCU (P1U)*

- *Clarify to the research community the University's policy regarding the introduction of Executive Faculties (with its hierarchical connotations) vis a vis the former School-based (flatter) structure. This would particularly help less senior members of the university to understand the roles of the OVPR and its concomitant committees and assist in clarifying their expectations of these bodies. It is imperative that the new administrative structures based around executive faculties and theme leaders are given clear roles in a wider university context (P3U)*

- *Confirm the role of the VPR. This to include the internal (operational and formulation of research strategy) and external (championing the DCU activities and contributions to various schemes and activities) roles. The establishment of the Director of RSS (primarily engaged with the operational activities) post should free the VPR to address the more strategic functions with greater vitality and focus. (P2U)*

- *We recommend that the VPR be fully briefed and indeed to be part of the special project initiatives run by the SPU. (P1U)*

- *Consideration should be given to the development of a new position of Dean for Graduate Studies. (P2U)*

- *A review of the role of the RAP Committee is recommended (P2U)*

- *Consideration to be given to the VPR being a part of the INVENT Board. (P3U)*

3. Develop the various interfacial activities of the OVPR

There are very good relationships between the OVPR and CSD and the Library. Due to the rapid expansion in research income, issues have arisen in the relationships between the OVPR and HR and Finance Departments in particular. These issues are resource based in the main (difficulties moving from a mainly teaching ethos to a more research orientated one) and will be offset somewhat by the new resources flowing from the SFI AOIP. We would encourage the OVPR to continue to interact with all research support units in developing a responsive and customer driven outlook. The development of SLAs between researchers and HR / Finance is necessary.

In the context of the operational activities, **develop the various interfacial activities of the OVPR**, including engagement with:

- a. Internal services such as HR, Finance, Library and Computing including, where appropriate,
    - i. Assisting with the transition from a teaching dominated culture to a research-led culture.
    - ii. Establishing service level agreements (SLA)
    - iii. Assisting with the agility of the interactions between academics and administrators by continuing the development of more user-friendly and effective computational aids to interacting with the various services.
- b. The academic community
    - i. Assisting with proposal preparation (one particular issue being that of EU proposals)
    - ii. Benefiting from the sense of improved collegiality and engagement resulting from the activities of the RAP
    - iii. Encouraging more responsible and productive interactions with the various service units.

- *We recommend that dedicated personnel be recruited to deal with research in HR and Finance. We believe that this is the case with the new arrangement with HR but we would recommend that such an arrangement would also be undertaken by Finance Department. (P1U)*

- *Consideration of putting in place SLAs between researchers and HR / Finance is necessary. (P3U)*

- *Develop mechanisms to assist with the transition from a teaching dominated culture to a research-led culture. (P3A/U)*

- *Develop a mechanism to assist with proposal preparation (one particular issue being that of EU proposals) (P1A)*

- *Support the development of clear reports in Agresso which are acceptable and user friendly by the researchers themselves and then provide training to the research community (P1A)*

4. Sharpen the delivery mechanisms for the two (strategic and operational) major functions and responsibilities of the OVPR

There is a significant need to collate the "intelligence" to help drive funding success. OVPR to develop a database of who is reviewing various national / international programmes to act as a point of contact for channelling such intelligence and developing a 'Mentoring' type activity for younger staff and less successful researchers. This should be part of a wider development to mentor researchers at DCU.

The Genius / RSS system is a major problem with researchers. A Research information support system that meets with the approval of researchers is absolutely necessary.

This sharpening of delivery would probably emerge from a reformation (membership, purpose and remit) of the various committees and bodies to which the OVPR relates as part of item 2 above and could include:

     a. Reaffirm the role of the Research Committee (RC) – the custodian of and mainly responsible for the formulation of the Research Strategy in DCU and chaired by the VPR.
     b. As previously outlined establish, say, a Strategy Implementation Sub-committee (SISC) of the RC to include the Faculty Associate Deans of Research (connecting in the Faculty Research Committees and their activities to the RC) and/or Executive Deans, the Theme Leaders, and the Heads of the National Centres to more effectively bridge research strategy, policy and operations at DCU.
     c. Reconstitute RAP as a standing Working group of SISC to assist with the dispersal of the DCU Internal Research Budget, retaining the benefits of improvements in the collegiality between Business, Humanities, Science and Engineering and the empowerment of the more junior staff of the University.
     d. Generate a more transparent top-down to bottom-up portfolio of delivery mechanisms for research in DCU.
     e. To enable the greater integration of research activities across the spectrum from fundamental to commercialised research, consider the inclusion of the VPR on the INVENT Board.

- *Consideration should be given to some form of incentivisation of the researchers to keep Genius/RSS records up to date.* (P2U/A)

- *Restructure the web pages to reduce burden on standard FAQs and ensure members of the OVPR utilise the web pages in their interactions with the community. (P2A)*

- *Develop mechanism to aid researchers at pre- proposal stages at a general and coordinated level. (P1A)*

- *Further development of matrices and benchmarking within the office. (P2A)*