

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement  
Programme for Academic Units  
2008-2009



Peer Review Group Report  
For the  
**Thematic Quality Review of the Postgraduate (taught &  
research) Student Experience**

1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009

## Membership of the Peer Review Group

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### **Acknowledgements**

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The Senior Management Team comprised of Prof. Ferdinand Von Prondynski (President), Prof. Anne Scott (Deputy President), Martin Conroy (Secretary), Ms. Marian Burns (Dir. Human Resources), Prof. Eugene Kennedy (Vice President for Research) and Mr. Frank Soughley (Finance Director).

Representatives from the following groups:

SAR Committee;  
Associate Deans of Research;  
Heads of Schools,  
Programme Chairs,  
Graduate Research Supervisors,  
Support Services and Facilities  
Administrative Staff;  
Post Graduate (Taught) and Post Graduate (Research) students  
The Students Union.

## Introduction

This Quality Review has been conducted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee (formerly CHIU – IUQSC) and complies with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997).

For the purpose of this report key terms have been abbreviated as follows:

<b>Peer Review Group:</b>	<b>PRG</b>
<b>Post Graduate Application Centre</b>	<b>PAC</b>
<b>Post Graduate Research</b>	<b>PGR</b>
<b>Post Graduate Taught:</b>	<b>PGT</b>
<b>Quality Improvement Plan:</b>	<b>QuIP</b>
<b>Self-Assessment Report:</b>	<b>SAR</b>

### 1. Background and Context to the Review process

1. The 2009 Thematic Quality Review of the Postgraduate (taught: PGT and research; PGR) Student Experience was completed in April 2009 by a five member review panel constituted according to Dublin City University guidelines ([www/dcu.ie/qpu](http://www/dcu.ie/qpu)).
2. The University has clearly defined academic structures for the development and support of postgraduate provision which it has identified in its new strategic plans ([www.dcu.ie/strategy](http://www.dcu.ie/strategy)) as a major growth area.
3. All taught postgraduate programmes are administered at School/Faculty level with the exception of those programmes offered by Oscail, which are administered by a unit in the office of the Vice President for Learning Innovation. In February of 2008/2009, 2194 students were formally registered on postgraduate programmes of study at DCU which represents an increase of 13% over the past four years. Some schools host large numbers in excess of 150 postgraduate taught students (PGTs) e.g. Business School (705), Nursing (194), Education (271), Law and Government (173) with others supporting fewer than 50 students (e.g. Chemical and Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences). An increasing proportion of PGTs (14% 2008/2009) are non-Irish. The balance of full and part time students varies across disciplines in a manner which is consistent with Higher Education trends in the UK and elsewhere in the EU.
4. Research postgraduates are the responsibility of schools, national research centres (e.g. National Centre for Sensor Research) and /or

university level units (e.g. LinK in the Business School) depending on the research programme to which doctoral candidates are recruited to, and funded from. The Office of the Vice President for Research is responsible for the implementation and delivery of the University's Research strategy. The Graduate Research Office provides generic support for all research postgraduate students. Additional resources are provided by INVENT, a state of the art Innovation and Enterprise Centre on the campus and the Research Support Services Unit. All of these units are housed in a single, purpose built facility.

5. There has been a steady increase in postgraduate students registering for research higher degrees over the past four years with a record 760 PhD students registered in 2008/2009. The number of students registering for a Masters by Research has declined over the same period which in part reflects changes in the doctoral programme provision with the introduction of the PhD track initiative. There are significantly more full time PhD students than part time and the proportion of international PGR students (36%) registering with DCU has also increased year on year.
6. Equality and diversity profiles were not provided in the Self Assessment Report beyond data for the number of disabled students declaring a disability when registering for postgraduate programmes.

#### **Development of Self Assessment Report**

7. The Peer Review Group was provided with a self assessment document well in advance of a formal programmed 2½ day visit to the campus. All arrangements for the visit were co-ordinated by the DCU Quality Promotion Unit.
8. The self assessment document provided a detailed summary of the methods and processes used by the Dublin City University as part of the internal self assessment of the student experience for taught and research postgraduate students. This confidential report covered all postgraduate students (e.g. masters and doctoral candidates, Irish and international) including those affiliated with Oscail and pursuing postgraduate study through distance learning routes. This was the first institutional review of the postgraduate student experience at Dublin City University.
9. Under the guidance of the Head of the Quality Promotion Unit, a working group led by co Chairs, Dr Joseph Stokes (Postgraduate Chair Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering), Prof. Gary Murphy (Director Graduate School) and Dr. Anne Morrissey (Postgraduate Chair, Oscail) was formed from staff representing a range of University units with direct responsibility for the academic, administrative and social well being of postgraduate students. No student representative was invited to be a member of this working group and the Peer Review Group recommended that the inclusion of student representatives should be considered in future.

10. The submitted report indicated that the self assessment process was completed over a four month period (November 2008 – February 2009) and that all relevant units from across the University (both academic and support) were involved at some stage in the process. The working group used group interviews, data from questionnaires and archive material to inform the development of the self-assessment report.
11. Despite the investment of substantial effort in developing the questionnaires and hosting focus groups, the overall participation rates were low for both designated groups (completed questionnaires - Taught Masters 22.5%; Research Students 37%; attendance at the focus group meetings 8 Taught Masters students out of 438 eligible candidates; 10 out of 238 registered PhD students) which made robust analyses of the data challenging. For any future reviews, the methods for engagement with staff and students should be re-considered to achieve broader and higher levels of representation

### **Conduct of Thematic Review**

12. The Peer Review Group was provided with an extensive orientation briefing during the first on- site meeting which included an overview of the context for the review from an institutional perspective. The Office of the Quality Promotion Unit provided guidance on the personnel and facilities being made available during the site visit, outlined the programme and provided a detailed summary of the schedule of proposed interviews. The orientation process concluded with a short summative overview of the SAR given by the senior staff directly involved in the preparation of same.
13. The Peer Review Group found this to be a very helpful means of initiating the site visit and providing a framework for the progress of the review.
14. The review programme allowed for meetings with staff from all of the service units supporting students during their study journey at DCU from initial enquiry and enrolment through to graduation. The Peer Review Group also met with academic staff who carried both academic and managerial responsibility for Masters students/programmes, and with staff responsible for the supervision and examination of doctoral candidates. The Peer Review Group was also given the opportunity to meet with the University President and with the senior executive officers of the institution.
15. The Peer Review Group was given the opportunity to invite additional staff or students to attend specific review meetings, and all reasonable effort was made to accommodate such requests during the two day site visit. The Peer Review Group followed the proposed schedule of meetings with only minor variances (*e.g. a meeting with Heads of Departments/ meeting with PhD supervisors*).

16. The Peer Review Group also completed an informative guided tour of the on-campus facilities including the Library, Sports Hall, Inter-faith Centre and some of the Science and Engineering laboratories.
17. In general the Peer Review Group found the programme for the visit to be well constructed and all meetings proved to be informative and valuable in the context of the review. All participants were clearly fully engaged with the review process and the Peer Review Group welcomed the open dialogue which developed during their meetings with both the staff and students.
18. An interestingly diverse range of views, opinions and perspectives were made visible over the two day programme of meetings which confirmed the rich and sometimes complex nature of the student journey at DCU. Both the staff and the students lauded the overall quality of the DCU experience although each group when interviewed made informed comments about areas where improvement(s) in the type and/or level of service and support would enhance overall provision. These mainly echoed and/or provided context for the comments made in the focus groups and the responses to the questionnaires.

### **Evaluation of Self Assessment Report**

19. The confidential SAR was well written, informative and reflective. Some initial data analysis had been included but overall the Peer Review Group concluded that the report was not sufficiently analytical in a manner which might inform future policy and planning developments especially in areas relating to academic matters (e.g. completion, progression).
20. The SAR was strongly biased towards an examination of the physical, administrative and pastoral environment which is provided for postgraduate students both in advance of their arrival and when on the campus. A comprehensive overview of the support structures was provided and the majority of the feedback comments from students centred on issues relating to the provision of non-academic support.
21. The University seeks to provide a rich and enabling environment for study which is appreciated and valued by the students. The extent to which the unique needs of postgraduate students are served was the subject of significant comment during the review visit. The Peer Review Group noted and commended a number of recent developments designed to improve the specific provision of support for postgraduate research students (e.g. Graduate School, dedicated library resources for research students).
22. The SAR contained little information about the mechanisms for the quality assurance of academic provision to postgraduate students beyond

describing the governance structures and responsibilities of units. The SAR team was unified in their opinion that the review should cover all dimensions of provision (academic, social/pastoral and physical) and this was confirmed by the Head of the Quality Review Unit. At the request of the Peer Review Group the programme of interviews was adjusted to provide greater opportunity for interaction with those individuals holding professional responsibility for academic quality assurance at school, centre and institutional level. This proved a valuable adjustment to the programme. In comments to a draft PGR report we noted a difference in interpretation between the Peer Review Group and the SAR Group here but it is our opinion that “academic matters” include the issues raised above.

## **Findings of the Peer Review Group**

### **2.1. Profile of Postgraduate Student Population in DCU**

As a result of University and national policy, the profile and the size of the postgraduate student population in DCU has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. The profile of the PGT and the PGR students has expanded to include many more international students as well as mature students, full-time as well as part-time students and DCU graduates as well as graduates from other universities in Ireland. Their experience before embarking on postgraduate study in DCU varies widely, both in the types of work and study they have undertaken as well as in their experience of different cultures. Their motivation for postgraduate study ranges from personal development to career advancement. While the growth in diversity of the postgraduate student population has led to the development of a vibrant and stimulating academic community, it also presents the university with significant challenges.

### **2.2. Existing Facilities, Services and General Academic Life**

The Peer Review Group was impressed by the physical provision on campus, in particular with the Library, including the Research Commons, the Sports Centre and the lab facilities.

The use of Moodle appears to be working well across campus and has become an important Teaching and Learning tool. The ongoing support and training for staff was commended and it was suggested that Orientation could usefully include an introduction to Moodle for postgraduate students.

The establishment of the Graduate Studies Office is clearly to be welcomed, as is the first attempt in the current academic year to offer Orientation for

PGRs. The Peer Review group noted that there is no corresponding office or University-wide Orientation for PGTs.

The professionalism of the staff in the services units is beyond question. However, they are working to a model which is based on the assumption that all students are full-time undergraduates who are present on campus from 9am to 5pm five days a week during the two semesters. The needs of the current postgraduate student population, which is on campus from early morning to late at night, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, will require a re-think of the current approach. This finding is again evident from student feedback in Section 2.4.

There also seems to be little coordination across service units at present, which can lead to a disjointed approach to service provision.

The cost of the Catering Service, which is run as a monopoly by a DCU campus company, arose in discussions with the students and the Senior Management group. It was the unanimous view of the students that the eateries on campus were too expensive; the University Secretary assured the Peer Review Group that a study he had undertaken proved definitively that prices were not more expensive than in other colleges.

The Peer Review Group was impressed by the 37 apartments available on campus for PGRs. Otherwise the accommodation service seems to rely heavily on commercial providers, which no doubt works well for students who have some knowledge of Dublin. However, students for whom English is not their first language and/ or who are unfamiliar with Dublin are not well served by this approach.

The fact that the approved formal means of communicating with students is via the DCU Email system needs to be communicated more clearly to students. It might also be helpful either to increase the space allocated to students on the system or to enable communication via students' private email addresses. This view was voiced strongly by both staff and students.

The Students Union provides services for all students on campus, irrespective of their discipline, level or mode of study. The officers of the Students Union admitted that it was often difficult to reach PGTs as they may only be on campus for 9 months or a year at most. The success of the Postgraduate Society depends on the engagement of the postgraduate students themselves.

### **2.3. Organisation, Management, Resources**

Postgraduate applications for PGTs are managed through the PAC system [www.pac.ie](http://www.pac.ie) (apart from Oscail programmes). Views on the effectiveness of PAC differed between the students, many of whom expressed dissatisfaction, and the staff in Registry and the Senior Management Group who felt that PAC



was working quite well but that some 'tweaking' was necessary. The recent establishment of a PAC users group may well go some way to resolving current difficulties.

Registration for PGTs and PGR's is now also online. It would appear from the student perspective to be experiencing some initial problems. Given the importance of this, the first contact with the university, it is to be hoped that a mechanism can be found to deal with these initial difficulties.

The management of PGT programmes is devolved through Schools to the Chairs of Postgraduate Programmes. This degree of devolution turns the Chairs into a 'one-stop shop' with all the attendant risks for Quality Assurance as well as the undue burden placed on these academic officers. The Chairs who met with the Peer Review Group were enthusiastic and caring colleagues who carried out their duties with a high degree of professionalism. However, the criteria for their appointments and the definition of their roles are currently unclear and not consistent across or indeed within some Schools. Furthermore, training for this important position currently relies on an informal briefing from the previous holder of the post. A further issue in relation to Quality Assurance is the widely varying workload allocation models across Schools, with some Chairs receiving recognition for their role and responsibilities and others not.

The management of the progression of PGRs from initial registration to graduation differs across Schools and Faculties and the Peer Review Group heard many examples of good practice in doctoral supervision. The training course for supervisors in the current academic year is a timely and important initiative.

The introduction of new types of doctoral study such as the structured PhD programme and the Professional Doctorate will necessitate an overhaul of the University's regulations. It is essential to involve all the stakeholders in this process and, when it is complete, to ensure that all those affected are fully briefed.

PGRs are often asked to undertake teaching/ demonstrating duties - and many are keen to do so. At the moment the conditions under which such PGRs work – in terms of payment and number of hours per week – vary widely. The current situation does not offer equality of opportunity to all PGRs. While some differences will always exist, it would make sense to develop a Graduate Teaching Assistant/ Demonstrator profile which would include training and a minimum level of remuneration.

## 2.4. Findings from Students

The Peer Review Group met with a range of PGR and PGT students and members of the Students Union, including the current President. These students represented an interesting mix of former DCU undergraduates, graduates of other Irish 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Institutions and two International students. Thus their experiences as outlined, presented the Peer Review Group with an insight into how DCU is viewed by a diverse postgraduate population. The students presented as an articulate and focussed group who overall gave a positive account of their DCU experience. It is important to note that while some students may have completed up to nine years in DCU, others may be experiencing the campus for the first time so there was a divergence of views expressed. It should also be noted that the Peer Review Group formed the view from speaking with the students that overall the PGR student had a more positive view of the DCU than the PGT student. This may be in part due to their more prolonged engagement with the university.

The Peer Review Group met five PGR students, including 2 International students. They had been involved in the initial Discussion Forum as part of the SAR process and they outlined that their involvement was initiated in most instances by their Research supervisor. It was also clear that this Forum included a high percentage of International students and that this Forum was well organised and clearly focussed on the PGR experience.

Key issues that emerged during the meeting were the problems with transport to the University and difficulties with availability of car parking on campus. While Sports facilities were seen as excellent, concern was expressed at the cost of on campus catering, a perceived lack of atmosphere on campus and the difficulties posed for students by the distance of the campus from the city, leading to a sense of isolation. Students need to access the campus after hours and currently such access is limited. As already outlined in 2.2 (p8) there was a perception that the campus catered for students on a 9 to 5 basis and that the needs of the postgraduate student were not factored into this model of access. Such a culture posed both academic and safety issues for the postgraduate community.

While students expressed a general level of satisfaction with their supervisors and felt that they had a good level of access to same, there was a feeling that meetings were on an ad-hoc basis and where difficulties might arise; there was no clear indication as to how these might be addressed. The experience of probationary transfer to the doctoral programme was generally seen as positive and the student's progression was evaluated by a number of academics within the research unit. Students were encouraged to present their work at Conferences at home and abroad. Students in some Schools were given the opportunity to work within their Schools as demonstrators or lecturers and at least one of the students had direct experience as a

representative on a University Committee. However, it was clear those issues around payment for such work undertaken as demonstrator or lecturer posed a problem for at least some of the students. (See 2.3 p9) Students were positive about the preparation time and support afforded to them for their final Viva Voce examination. However, there was evidence to suggest that this was not a view held by all the participants in the review process.

Again dissatisfaction was expressed with the lack of space provided on the DCU email server, which hampered communication and in some cases affected their ability to engage in good working practices. (e.g. data archiving of research results).

While the University does have a Post Grad Society, there was a general feeling that the Student Union activities focussed on undergraduate students, with meetings taking place during the day. This view was not shared by the representatives from the Student Union. It was felt that many international students used the Society to meet other students and this was seen as a positive aspect.

In terms of International student support, the International Office was seen as a positive help from the perspective of induction but the absence of support around sourcing of accommodation was a particular cause for concern. In many instances this support came from within the School or Faculty.

For all students, there was an absence of structured presentations on working in business and/or industry.

The Peer Review Group also met with 3 students from the PGT community and while many of the issues raised by the former group were again in evidence, some additional ones were also articulated by this group. Much of the discussion focussed on the academic experiences of this cohort. It was also evident that this group was not as involved in the Quality Review process as the former group, due to time constraints.

Online registration posed particular difficulties for PGT's. In addition, there is no formal orientation for the PGT student and this was seen as a distinct disadvantage. The group again articulated the problems with a lack of out of hour's services, cost of food on campus, the perceived lack of competition and the absence of part-time posts for students in the catering sector within the college. College support services were not generally known to PGT students and it was felt that these groups should make their presence known to the student through face-to-face meetings at Induction. The International student within the group again highlighted the lack of support in terms of sourcing accommodation.

At class level there was some perceived tension arising out of a lack of clear guidelines around individual student contribution to group assignments. Students would welcome input on Group Dynamics where such processes

were used as part of the assessment criteria. The issue of norms around what constituted correct citation and referencing was also raised, where within specific cultures different approaches may be used. It was felt that a focussed Orientation programme could resolve many of these issues. While students were provided with some feedback from lecturers, students would welcome a more focussed approach.

Issues around lack of uniformity in the use of Moodle, lack of space on the DCU email server and the resulting problems around group and class communication were again highlighted. Students proposed the inclusion of a section within the DCU website for FAQ's. Overall the level of satisfaction of this group was lower than that of the PGR student group.

The Student Union group identified problems around interacting with a disparate postgraduate student body. There was a perceived social delineation between these and the undergraduate population which can be difficult to breach. While all clubs and societies are open to PG students, there was little representation from this group as meetings generally took place during the day. No Needs Analysis has been conducted by the Student Union for this group, thus making it difficult to plan for the future. The Union highlighted the difficulties posed by lack of an orientation Programme, thus offering no real opportunities to address the postgraduate community.

A DCU Web page aimed specifically at postgraduate students was suggested as a means of strengthening communication between the PG student and the Student Union.

## **2.5. Findings from Staff**

The Peer Review Group met with seven groups of staff, as follows:

- Associate Deans of Research and the Director of Graduate Research
- Representatives of Chairs of Taught Programme
- Staff members from Support Services and Facilities, including members from Applications, Admissions, Registration and Fees
- General Administration Staff
- Representatives of Heads of School
- Representatives of Supervisors
- Senior Management

The Peer Review Group noted that the University had appointed a Director of Graduate Research two years ago (1 April 2007) whose responsibility was to drive the development of research postgraduate education. By 2014, DCU expects to have more than 900 PGRs and graduate more than 100 PhDs each year. The Director chairs the Graduate Studies Board which meets every two months. This Board advises on policy, is responsible for the appointment

of External Examiners and is currently undertaking a full review of the postgraduate regulations.

The Peer Review Group noted that Postgraduate progression aims to be a rigorous process involving the supervisor and the student. Progression assessments are attended by the supervisor, a second assessor plus the Research Co-ordinator. Generally it is undertaken at 12-monthly intervals, but in some schools (e.g. DCUBS) progression is assessed at 6-monthly intervals.

The Peer Review Group also noted that there is a transition from the traditional single supervisor model for PGRs to a shared form of supervision and progression monitoring. Generic skills modules are delivered at university level. Domain specific modules are being developed within the Schools and accredited by the Graduate Studies Board. There is a stated commitment to developing the link between teaching and research, though it is not entirely clear how this is to be achieved. Training courses are being provided for supervisors.

The Peer Review Group noted that a single Marks and Standards covered all undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Unless there is derogation for a module, each module can be repeated up to four times. This can also happen in the case of a dissertation as this element forms a single module. The Peer Review Group noted that there are differences between programmes in the application of Marks and Standards. It also seemed that lack of input into the timing of Programme Board Meetings led to diary clashes for academic staff.

Newly appointed Programme Chairs depended on detailed hand-over notes from the previous Chair. This situation might be improved by having an induction programme for newly appointed Chairs. It was interesting to note that the academic staff members were very critical of the PAC application interface and this can be contrasted with the views of the administrative staff (see below). In particular, a more user-friendly mechanism for archiving applicants' qualifications at entry needed to be developed so that the subsequent checks relating to a student's academic career could be readily completed; this facility is not currently available.

The Moodle Platform seems to be well accepted and used within the academic and information technology staff.

In common with student feedback, there was a general unease amongst staff that services (including academic, catering, access to laboratories) were not adequate for those students whose needs were outside the normal hours and work days of the University (e.g. part-time students, off-campus students, research postgraduates requiring access to laboratories at late hours).

Administrative staff noted that the student card for life programme was an improvement for all students. One-day Induction Programmes have now been introduced for the PGRs, but are generally not offered to PGTs. Problems

have been encountered in communicating with postgraduate students and it was noted that some students do not use their DCU email accounts. In general, the administrative staff said that the PAC on-line application system worked well as far as they were concerned, though this was disputed by the student findings.

The Senior Management Group outlined that a key strategy of the university is to rebalance the student numbers, by growing both the number and proportion of the postgraduate cohort. This strategy is aligned to Government policy as set out in the Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation. Funding was identified as a major challenge to deliver on this strategy, given the current financial constraints as well as the costs inherent in the strategy.

On the research side students were identified as both a resource and as customers. A key development over the last couple of years has been the growth in cross disciplinary research groups, identified as a key strength in DCU. This has enabled the establishment of national research centres on campus as well as allowing DCU to compete favourably for national and European Framework Funding. The importance of the research agenda is recognised by the establishment of a research office with a VP for Research and a Dean to represent the interests of the research postgraduate students.

The future strategy will be to transition from an apprentice type model for research PhDs to a structured graduate research education programme focussing on transferable as well as knowledge and competency skills. This model will require additional expertise and resources to deliver. The college will continue to grow critical research mass, grow the numbers of PG s and post doctoral students, build relationships and collaboration with enterprise and compete for national and European funding.

Coupled with the growth in PGR's has been a high increase in the PGT population, with a shift towards more mature students and non standard entrants. These fee paying programmes were identified as critical income generating activities for the university. Students are registered on full payment of fees. An instalment payment process was not offered as an option as it might be a disincentive for students to complete the programme. The PGT full and part -time programmes create peaks in resource needs within the academic year as well as extend the working day, factors which challenge the system to provide an adequate service. A response has been to set up student experience working groups which report to the Director of Student Support and Development. The group acknowledged that there were difficulties in the communications feed back loop with the PGT cohort.

## **2.6. Other Findings**

Other findings confirm the impressions gained from the consultations described above and underline the conclusion that the university needs to develop a clear overview of what constitutes the student journey from initial contact with the university, through registration, orientation, progression and final exit.

The Peer Review Group noted that the strategy of DCU to increase postgraduate numbers has implications for all members of the university community and will require extensive planning and consultation.

The Group noted over the three day review that while there was a strong commitment to ensuring the highest quality of experience for the PG student, this was being hampered because of a lack of communication between all of the relevant administrative and academic staff. There is also a disconnect between Heads of School and the policy makers within the university.

The university cannot lose sight of the link between the undergraduate experience and the success of the PG initiative. The meetings with students and staff seemed to indicate a difference in perception around the needs of the PGR and PGT student. Overall the level of satisfaction of the PGT experience may not be as positive as the university had assumed. This group needs to be nurtured within the university as they provide a valuable asset and a link through part-time students to the wider working world

## 2.7. Summary of Findings (in the form of a SWOC analysis)

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Physical Provision (Library, research commons, sports centre, lab facilities)</li> <li>2. Moodle platform.</li> <li>3. Successful track record growing PG numbers.</li> <li>4. Research Graduate Studies Office.</li> <li>5. Champion at senior staff level for PGR.</li> <li>6. Interdisciplinary research teams.</li> <li>7. National Research Centres.</li> <li>8. Professionalism of services staff.</li> <li>9. Professionalism &amp; enthusiasm of academic staff.</li> <li>10. Senior Management Team</li> <li>11. Positive student reflection of PG experience.</li> <li>12. Diversity of student background/ experiences.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PGT engagement &amp; services provision (orientation, catering, registration, security, meetings, Student Union interaction.)</li> <li>2. Absence of low cost catering options on site/adjacent to campus.</li> <li>3. Insufficient student type accommodation on site/adjacent to campus.</li> <li>4. Inadequate accommodation support service.</li> <li>5. Insufficient car parking capacity.</li> <li>6. Limited storage of DCU email system.</li> <li>7. Inflexibility of PAC system.</li> <li>8. 'One stop shop' burden of responsibilities on school chairs.</li> <li>9. Absence of/lack of knowledge of problem escalation &amp; resolution processes (PGR).</li> <li>10. Absence of consistency in PGR progression criteria.</li> <li>11. Absence of consistency in application of Marks &amp; Standards across schools</li> </ol>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grow interdisciplinary research activities to leverage cross learning and build new research niches.</li> <li>2. Grow collaborative research engagements across Europe with enterprise &amp; other research schools to better compete for Framework funding.</li> <li>3. Be an incubator for new business &amp; wealth creation in North Dublin &amp; Dublin Belfast corridor.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide for and manage the growth of PG numbers.</li> <li>2. Source finance for further development &amp; provision of new programmes</li> <li>3. Demonstrate &amp; measure value output in terms of sustainable economic growth</li> </ol>



## **Peer Group Recommendations**

**Recommendations to the University are addressed to the Executive which should decide which member of the Senior Management Group is best placed to take responsibility for acting upon each of the Peer Review Group's recommendations.**

1. (P1) The University should frame its support and design of services for PGT and PGR students around a model which employs an integrated, holistic view of the student journey and accommodates the different needs, expectation and experiences of incoming students. In developing this model the University should :
  - a. seek to produce a map of the student journey for the identified student cohorts (e.g. PGT + PGR, full-time + part-time, Irish students + international students, DCU graduates + graduates from other Irish universities, mature students + students who have come directly from an undergraduate programme), (Sections 2.1/ 2.2/2.6 )- **Responsibility:Executive, Deans, Heads of Units**);
  - b. consider again the isolated nature of University campus and the significant use of core resources at non conventional times by PGT and PGR students including their need for administrative support and their access to the physical infrastructure (e.g. safety, access to labs, library and catering) (Sections 2.3/2.4/2.6), **Responsibility:Executive, Deans, Heads of Units**).
2. (P1) As part of the University's strategy to grow numbers of PGT students, the Peer Review Group strongly recommends the appointment of a senior officer to champion PGT needs within the DCU community (Section 2.2) **Responsibility:Executive**).
3. (P2) On the basis of all evidence received, the Peer Review Group recommends that the University:
  - a. prioritise staff development across all relevant units (academic and administrative) in order to reflect the increasing numbers, diversity and complexity of the PGT and PGR student populations (Sections 2.2/2.3./2.4./2.5 **Responsibility:Executive, Deans, Heads of Units**
  - b. develop more effective means of communicating current approved policies to both staff and students and should review the use of the DCU email system as a major means of communication between staff and students - (Sections 2.2/2.4/2.5) **Responsibility:Executive**.

4. (P2) The University should develop and promote effective guidance to define roles and inform conduct in the context of PGR progression and final examination (Sections 2.3/2.5) (**Responsibility: Graduate Research School**).
5. (P1) The University should develop a more robust Quality Assurance framework which focuses more on managing the risks associated with the apprenticeship model (PGR) and/or the single point of contact model (PGT) (e.g. training of Supervisors, Project Managers, Programme Chairs, Heads of School) (Sections 2.3/2.5)- (**Responsibility: Executive, Deans, Graduate School, Heads of Units**).
6. (P2) The University should review workload allocation models across Schools to ensure that the role and responsibilities of Programme Chairs are managed consistently and equitably across the institution (Section 2.3) - (**Responsibility: Executive, Deans**).
7. (P2) The University should address anomalies in the Marks and Standards relating to Taught Postgraduate programmes with particular reference to the dissertation/ project (Section 2.5) (**Responsibility: Registry, Deans, Programme Chairs, Heads of Units**).
8. (P3) In future, the University should consider
  - a. the inclusion of student representatives on the Self Assessment Committee supporting a thematic review and any equivalent entity (Section 1.9)- (**Responsibility: Quality Promotion Unit**);
  - b. a methodology for self assessment which secures a broader level of engagement and higher levels of representation (Section 1.11)- (**Responsibility: Quality Review**)

## Appendix 1

### List of those who met with the Peer Review Group

#### ***Self Assessment Report (SAR) Committee***

Dr. J. Stokes, Prof. G. Murphy, Dr. A. Morrissey, Dr. C. Bohan  
Ms. A. McKenna

#### ***Associate Deans of Research***

Prof. Gary Murphy, Dr. Patrick Brereton, Dr. Dermot Brabazon,  
Prof. Kathy Monks, Dr. Enda McGlynn

#### ***Heads of School***

Prof. Saleem Hashmi, Prof. John Costello, Prof. David Jacobsen

#### ***Programme Chairs/ Research Supervisors***

Prof. Joe Morris, Prof. Helena Sheehan, Dr. Dorothy Kenny, Mr. Martin Quinn, Dr.  
Anne Morrissey

#### ***Support Services and Facilities***

Deirdre Moloney, Muireann Ni Dhuigean, Helena Aherne, Sylvia Schroder,  
Celine Jamieson, Gillian Barry, Mahon McNamara, Miriam Corcoran, Patricia Barry,  
Marie Heraughty, Angela Mitchell, Deirdre Kelly, Aengus Gordon, Siobhan Murphy

#### ***Administrative Staff***

Tanya Sereti, Sonya McKenna, Pamela Galvin, Rachel Keegan  
Goretti Daughton, Michelle Pringle, Michelle Brennan  
Tanya Keogh

#### ***PGR and PGT Students***

Shahriar Hasan, Sabine Moebs, Jennifer Dowling, Mahua Biswas, Rosina  
Owens, Marian Flanagan, Ruigi Wang, Mark Dolan, Sinead Ni Chruialaoi

#### ***Student Union/ Clubs and Societies***

Niall McClave, Susan Hurley, Roisin Ni Donncha, Una Redmond.

