

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement
Programme for Administrative Units
2004-2005



Peer Review Group Report
for the
Student Finance Committee Office

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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 (QulP)
 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.**

Format of the Review Group Report

1. Profile of the Unit

Location of the Unit

The Student Finance Committee (SFC) and its constituent bodies are centrally located in the Student Centre the 'HUB'. The Student Finance Committee (SFC) and its constituent bodies, The Students' Union(SU), Sports Club Committee(SCC) and Societies and Publications Committee(SPC) occupy office space on the first floor of the HUB and have one small front-office space and a multi-purpose entertainment centre, with a capacity of 240-900 complete with sound, lighting and stage equipment managed by the SU Events Co-ordinator, located on the ground floor.

Staff

The Student Finance Committee (SFC) employs an Administrative Officer (AO). In addition to the Administrative Officer, the SFC and its constituent bodies employ a number of support personnel, both full-time and part-time to support the work of the SPC, SCC and Students' Union. Full and part-time permanent staff are supported by 15 Community Employment Project(CEP) workers.

Product / Processes

The Student Finance Committee (SFC) was established in 1982 to deal with the efficient administration of the finances of the Students' Union and of Student Clubs and Societies. It acts as the umbrella body for the Societies and Publications Committee (SPC), the Sports Club Committee (SCC) and the Students' Union (SU) in Dublin City University and is responsible for the distribution of capitation funds to the individual bodies.

The level of funding administered by the SFC has grown enormously, reflecting the rapid expansion in student numbers in DCU during the 90's.

1986-87	1991-92	1996-97	2001-02	2004-05
€120,000	€180,000	€350,000	€619,000	€767,000

Overall capitation funding – at 5 yearly intervals since 1987

The SFC was incorporated in 1987 and the SFC members serve as directors of the company. It is a company, limited by guarantee, which relieves the individual members of liability except in the case of proven fraud. The SFC is constituted as follows:

- Two representatives from the SU
- Two representatives from the SCC
- Two representatives from the SPC
- Two directly elected representatives from the general student body
- One representative from Union Council(class representatives)
- University representative
- SFC Administrative Officer, who acts as Secretary and Treasurer

1. The Self-Assessment Process

The Quality Co-ordinating Committee

Name	Job Title	Affiliation
Una Redmond, Chair	Administrative Officer	SFC
Paul May	SU President	SU
Riona Judge McCormack	SPC Chair	SPC
Breifne Earley	SCC Chair	SCC
Yvonne O'Connor	Sports and Recreation Officer	SCC
Patricia Wheatley	CEP Supervisor	SFC CEP
Fiona Farrell	CEP Participant	SFC CEP
Siobhan Byrne	Clubs and Socs Finance Officer	SCC and SPC
Sarah Farrell	SFC Chair	SFC
Kevin Delaney	Events Co-Ordinator	SU

Methodology Adopted

The Quality Committee was formed during Autumn 2004 and quickly set about the work required to prepare for the Quality Review. The Quality Review Committee (QRC) met at least once a week during the self-evaluation phase, in addition to being involved in the planning of the focus group sessions. The staff and the constituent committees were kept informed of the progress at their regular meetings. An Away Day was held in November to examine in broad terms the aims and objectives of the SFC and its constituent sub groups. This involved all the Quality Review Committee and was facilitated by an outside training professional. The deliberations and performance ratings from the Away Day was brought back to the general meeting of the SFC and SPC for discussion and also to the SPC and SCC and SU executive committees.

Data was requested from various groups, student surveys and focus group meetings were conducted. In January 2005, the data available were compiled and analysed and the Self-Assessment report prepared.

2. The Peer Review Group Process

Methodology

The visit followed the timetable developed by the Quality Co-ordinating Committee in collaboration with the Quality Promotion Unit. The self-assessment report and background information on the process was provided to the PRG in advance.

The two days of the review were spent in interview and discussions with representatives of QRC, representatives of SFC, SPC, SCC, SU, Staff, various users of the service and senior Management of DCU.

Overview of the site visit

In terms of the many meetings held, the PRG was impressed by the open and honest way the many stakeholders put their views forward. The staff and students treated the Review very seriously clearly seeing it for the quality improvement opportunities it presented.

Schedule of Activity

Preliminary Meeting (Wednesday 9 February 2005)

An initial meeting of the PRG was held on Wednesday 6th February to receive a briefing from the Director of Quality Promotion. This meeting provided the opportunity to raise any general issues and to agree the schedule of activities for the site visit. At this stage, a Chair was appointed.

The PRG met with representatives from QRC to discuss key elements of the Self-Assessment Report.

Site Visit (Thursday 10- Friday 11 February)

Day One began with a meeting of the PRG with the SFC Administrative Officer (AO) and a meeting with the President, DCU Students' Union. These meetings were essentially exploratory in nature and helpfully provided elucidation for the PRG on many issues raised in the Report. There then followed a visit to the core facilities of the SFC, to include the HUB and DCU Sports Complex. In the afternoon, a series of meetings was held with staff, Director of Student Affairs, SCC, SPC, SU and student representatives.

On the second day the PRG met with the President and other senior officers of the University. This provided an opportunity to raise the main issues of importance the PRG had identified from the Self Assessment report and the various meetings the previous day.

Review Group's view of the Self-Assessment Report

At the outset the PRG would like to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by the SFC and its constituent bodies in preparing their self-assessment report.

The PRG confirmed that the analysis of strengths and weaknesses was accurate during the review. Results from student surveys and focus group survey notes were well documented in the report.

The SFC is commended both for the quality and comprehensiveness of its self-assessment report and its responsiveness to requests for additional information during the visit.

Many of the recommendations set out below have been framed on the basis that the Quality Review process is a continuing and evolving process and should not be seen as a criticism of the work undertaken to date.

These recommendations build on the SFC and its constituent bodies desire to offer a high quality service and the provision of a Student Centre providing opportunities for student development

Recommendations for improvement

1. The PRG recommends the development of a SFC strategic plan and review mechanism. The PRG also recommends that documented processes for strategic planning and operational administration are maintained. This will help to ensure that clear and published procedures are adopted and maintained and followed in planning the future of the SFC and in managing its daily business.

The PRG recommends that the SFC require a strategic plan from each of the bodies to which it allocates funds, and puts in place mechanisms to ensure no inappropriate overlap or duplication of effort. The SFC should ensure that implementation schedules for the plans are put in place, and progress reviewed regularly and at least annually.

The PRG believe that any failure to follow through on the self-critical aspects of the Quality Reviews and the strategic intentions outlined, could lead to unfocussed and unrewarded effort in the future.

2. The PRG recommends that the two directly elected representatives from the general student body positions be removed from the Student Finance Committee. The SFC composition would be as follows:

- Two representatives from the SU
- Two representatives from the SCC
- Two representatives from the SPC
- One representative from Union Council (class representatives)
- The Director of Student Affairs
- The Administrator of the SFC (AO) (Secretary/Treasurer) (Non-Voting)

3. The PRG recommends that the SFC Administrative Officer (AO) be entitled, as of right, to consult with and be advised by the Director of Student Affairs, DCU, who will take appropriate notice of such issues as may be raised.

4. The PRG recommends that all staff should be employed by the SFC, thus providing greater flexibility, opportunities for secondment and an enhanced service. The PRG believes that the current staff structures are too complex and do not best serve the interests of the SFC, its constituent bodies or its stakeholders.

The PRG recommends that overall responsibility for staff management and budget adjustments should be delegated to the SFC AO, working in conjunction with the other parties involved.

5. The PRG recommends that the SFC put in place training and development programs. This should also involve the provision of standard operating procedures, manuals and good briefing notes. The PRG has identified four major training areas as follows:

- a. Crossover training for sabbatical officers
- b. Staff development
- c. Class representatives
- d. Committee members

6. The PRG recommends that perceived shortcomings in communication, and the lack of a credible presence on the web should be addressed and agreed formal structures put in place, with particular reference to

- Inter-staff communications (led by the AO)
- Communication between the SU and the general student body (led by the President of the SU)
- Website (operated and maintained by the Publications Officer)
- Communication between the various committees (led by the President of the SU)

7. The PRG recommends that immediate steps be taken to make the HUB more attractive to the student body as a venue for running events. Current management structures involving the HUB Management Committee, Campus Properties Limited, the HUB Manager, the SFC, the various student bodies, and the relationship between all of these must be reformed and made effective. At present there is a lack of vision and effective management. It is a cause of concern to the review group that so many student social activities are choosing off-campus venues. If this continues, the HUB will have failed.

The PRG also noted many concerns expressed in relation to the HUB and its venue (including the perception of excessive security costs during events) and believes that these should be addressed.

8. The PRG recommends that the SFC and the University put in place formal systems to improve the partnership between them, in order to enhance the student experience, which must be a shared concern for both parties

The PRG commends the SFC for requesting that they be included in the University schedule of Quality audits.

The PRG would like to thank, most sincerely, all those who we met during our visit for their willing co-operation and helpful suggestions.

The PRG wish to thank the Quality Promotion Director and SFM for their positive contributions and their generous hospitality and courtesy.