



Peer Review Group Report for Finance Office

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1 Introduction and Context

The broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement at DCU aims to promote and develop a culture of quality throughout all aspects of the University. The framework derives from the spirit of Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement enshrined in the Universities Act (1997), which is the legislative basis for quality throughout the Irish University sector, and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The processes for quality reviews at DCU are further aligned to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the published guidelines of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI).

This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the **Finance Office**, following a visit (virtual) by the Peer Review Group (PRG) undertaken on **25th – 28th May 2021**.

1.1 Overview of the Area under Review

Since the last Quality Review in 2014, the University and the Finance Office have undergone significant change. In September 2016, the University completed the process of incorporating St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (SPD), Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI) and the Church of Ireland College (CICE) into DCU, resulting in a significant increase in staff and student numbers and an expansion to a multi-campus environment. The Finance Office played a key role in that process, and in many other significant institutional developments in the intervening period. These involvements include:

- Supporting the University in the implementation and approval of its Campus Development Plan in 2015 - engaging with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), to put loan finance of €130m in place.
- Essential contributor to the Student Information System (SIS) Programme - preparing the business case, leading the procurement and vendor negotiation parts of the programme, and ongoing involvement of senior management and functional units in SIS steering group, committees, programme work streams and individual projects.
- Implementation of Prevero software for business intelligence capacity in supporting financial reporting and financial planning activities

The role of the Finance Function is to provide strategic leadership in relation to all financial matters, to ensure that the DCU Group is financially sustainable, and that it has the necessary financial resources to achieve the objectives of the DCU Strategy. As a public body with 49% of its revenue received from the state, the Finance Office plays an important role in ensuring that, particularly in financial matters, DCU acts at all times in an ethical, accountable and transparent manner in keeping with what is expected of a publicly funded institution. In addition, the Finance Office plays an important stewardship role in ensuring the University policies and procedures, as they relate to finance, are followed as well as the relevant financial, taxation and procurement legislation and regulations, together with applicable Government circulars.

The Finance Office has overall responsibility for the financial control environment within the University and provides a comprehensive range of services to DCU Faculties, Schools, Research Centres, Professional Service Departments and the DCU commercial Group of companies. Since 2016, the Finance Offices has been located in Albert College on Glasnevin Campus, operating over two floors. This relocation emerged from actions identified in the last Quality Improvement Plan.

The Finance Office currently has 59 staff members. The Finance Office is led by the Director of Finance with the support of the Finance Senior Management Team. Finance staff provide services across seven main functional areas: Finance Operations (Payroll, Accounts Payable, Fees/Accounts Receivable), Financial Planning/Management Accounts, Research Finance, Financial Reporting, Finance Systems,

Insurance and Procurement. Within each functional area there are functional units. DCU Commercial Group of companies is managed by the Director of Finance. The Financial Controllers/Accountants of the Commercial Group of Companies also sit within the Finance Office but work closely on a day to day basis with the administration staff within the respective companies.

The Director of Finance is a member of the Senior Management Team of the University and he reports directly to the President. He sits on many of the principal committees in the University including Governing Authority, Executive Committee, Budget Committee, Capital Projects Committee, Heads and Deans, and project committees such as the Student Information System (SIS) project and Human Capital Initiative project. Other members of the Finance Office sit on various committees across a range of DCU projects. Externally, the Director of Finance represents DCU on the Chief Financial Officers group within the Irish Universities Association (IUA), while the Head of Financial Planning / Senior Project Manager represents the University on the Finance Officers Group.

2 Approach to Self-Assessment

2.1 Quality Review Committee

The self-assessment phase of the Quality Review was led by an internal quality review committee (QRC). The QRC was formed in December 2020 and the first meeting was held on 22nd January 2021. The Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research attended this meeting and introduced the rationale and purpose of the Quality review, and the steps towards completing self-assessment.

There were five committee meetings held during the Self-Assessment Period. Committee members consisted of representatives (of different levels) across various functional areas within the Finance office and there were 13 members in total. Committee membership as follows:

- Jennifer O'Halloran - Controller Group Financial Operations
- Eamonn Cuggy - Senior Project Manager/SIS/GM DSPK
- Kathryn Geraghty - Assistant Financial Controller
- Robbie Walsh - Payroll Manager
- Andrew Brady - Accounts Payable Team Lead
- Damian Dowdall - Trispace Financial Controller
- Brendan Blake - Insurance Manager
- Eileen O'Keefe - Procurement Officer
- Fiona Maguire - Financial Planning Accountant
- John Morrissey - Research Finance Accountant
- Susan McLean - Finance Systems Administrator
- Louise Skelly - Fees/Accounts Receivable Supervisor
- Yvonne Murray - Accounts Payable Analyst & Compliance Support

The PRG were impressed with the diversity of the QRC membership, with representation at different grades, covering functional units and the commercial group.

Each QRC member was responsible for the following self-assessment activities:

- (a) Assisting with the composition, structure and format of Focus Groups/Workshops/Interviews.
- (b) Providing content and documenting key quality improvements and structures within their own teams for inclusion in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). This included:
 - Team Structure (Hierarchy & FTE) and how work is allocated between team members
 - Overview of the key duties of the team
 - Key IT system changes and process changes
 - Appendices – examples of reports and KPI's to back up quality achievements noted

All documentation in relation to the Quality Review was shared with all QRC members via Google Drive. As regards communication between the QRC and all other Finance staff, the Quarterly Finance Communications Meetings held in December 2020 and March 2021 were used to keep staff informed regarding the progress of the Quality Review. The PRG were impressed by the robust and honest nature of the approach to self-assessment.

2.2 The Self-Assessment Report

The PRG was generally impressed with the comprehensive nature of the SAR and with the self-reflective nature of the discussion and analysis undertaken by the QRC. The methodology adopted to gather information was sound and effective. There was strong evidence of engagement with staff within the Finance Office and cross-area representation of stakeholders, including students, academics, senior management and professional staff from across the university. Each of the engagement modes used (focus groups, forums, workshop, 1:1 interviews) provided important stakeholder feedback, and the PRG appreciated the outputs being forwarded on request.

The supporting documentation provided with the SAR provided a strong evidence base from which to analyse the conclusions drawn. The structure of the SAR is logical and well-presented and certainly facilitates an understanding of the current situation of the Finance Office and the complexity of the issues that it faces. It is evident that the SAR is a self-reflection document, which adequately assesses the effectiveness of the Finance Office in relation to all its areas of activity.

While the PRG found the SAR and SWOT analysis largely effective, it is recommending some changes based on an analysis of the outputs from the stakeholder consultations. In this regard, the PRG is of the view that many of the proposed 'threats' can also be thought of as 'challenges' and will use both terms in the amended SWOT featured in section 6.1 of this report.

3 Approach Taken By Peer Review Group

3.1 Peer Review Group Members

Membership of the Peer Review Group for the Quality Review was as follows,

- Ms. Joanne Jones, Chief Financial Officer, University of Sheffield (Chair)
- Dr. Donnchadh Ó Madagáin, Director of Finance, National College of Ireland
- Mr. John Daly, Former Finance Director, An Post Retail
- Mr. Gareth Yore, Deputy Director of Operations & Employee Relations, Dublin City University
- Ms. Fiona Brennan, Research Support Manager, Dublin City University
- Mr. Seán Smyth, Final Year Bachelor of Education Student, Dublin City University

3.2 Overview of Approach Taken by Peer Review Group

The SAR, Appendices and related background documents about the Quality Review process were circulated electronically by email to the PRG on the 4th May 2021. Hard copies of the SAR were also posted to the PRG. The PRG members individually completed an Initial Impressions Template - these comments were then consolidated by the Quality Promotions Office and made available to the Peer Review Group ahead of the preparatory meeting on the 18th May 2021. As part of that meeting, the chairperson (Jo Jones) was selected from the external PRG membership, and there was discussion around the key themes emerging from our initial impressions of the SAR and accompanying documentation. Areas of responsibility were subsequently assigned to PRG members to explore those key themes with stakeholder groups.

The site visit was conducted online due to COVID-19 restrictions, and took place from the 25th - 28th May 2021. There was a strong level of engagement and openness of communication between the key stakeholders and the PRG during the visit. This facilitated the work of the PRG. In addition, the QPO assisted the PRG in arranging an additional stakeholder meeting with members from the DCU Governing Authority Membership, which was much appreciated. The QPO also obtained additional supporting information from the Finance Office on request, and this was provided to the PRG in a timely fashion. QPO support in-session with note-taking and online meeting room management was essential, given the tight timeframe for the site visit.

Post site review, the PRG agreed upon the division of report sections to be drafted, and met a further five times to review content and confirm the prioritisation of recommendations made.

The PRG regrets that the meetings with the different stakeholders could not be done on a face-to-face basis as we believe that it would have facilitated better discussions and enabled us to ask more questions. However, in current times, this was not possible for obvious reasons and we thank all participants for their commitment and manner in which our Zoom meetings operated. In the same way, our own interactions with each other were made more difficult than would have been the case had we all managed to work together in one room. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, we believe that we have worked well together to produce this report.

4 Approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement

4.1 Effectiveness of Quality Assurance

The PRG recognises that significant progress has been made against the quality improvement plan produced by the Finance Office following the 2014 PRG report. On that occasion, twenty-two recommendations were made against the following five broad categories: Staffing and Accommodation; Finance Office Response to Strategic Challenges; Functions, Activities and Processes; Client Perspective; and Finance Office Perspective. As per the QUIP Progress Update table (provided as an appendix to the SAR), it appears all P1 and P2 recommendations have been acted upon. The PRG commends this, given it has been a period of considerable change and growth within the University, and the Finance Office have contributed significantly to a number of large scale projects, not least Incorporation, during that time. Despite these significant operational challenges, and external factors, such as persistent underfunding of the sector and the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a steady focus on areas for improvement.

4.2 Progress Since Last Review

Staffing and Accommodation

Recommendations in this category were addressed with a move of location to a two-floor space in Albert College, Glasnevin Campus in 2016. The new space has been a very positive and welcomed move. This appears to have future-proofed staff space requirements, enabling the Finance Office to grow the team in specific areas and respond to future developments.

Finance Office Response to Strategic Challenges

Significant staff restructuring has taken place in order to build and manage the necessary resources to implement strategic projects, and respond effectively to the financial support needs of the university post-Incorporation. In regard to the effectiveness of processes and skills required to address cross-organisational research support activities, gaps and opportunities for improvement were identified and a number of projects were undertaken to deliver a more efficient and streamlined service to those stakeholders. Communication channels have been further developed, notably in relation to budget preparation, training workshops and quarterly internal presentations from the Finance Senior Management Team to all finance staff. The early involvement of Finance Office staff as a requirement for strategic initiatives across the organisation is evident from the number of initiatives in the intervening period that Finance have played a key role in. The Finance Office has aligned their objectives with those in the institutional strategy, and reports

annually against the stated indicators of success/progress. Finally, the translation of strategic goals down to operational teams and individuals has been facilitated via a range of workshops held with Finance Office staff, focused on the role of the Finance Office in implementing the DCU strategy.

Functions, Activities and Processes

There has been an increased focus on the budget process, with increased frequency of meetings with budget holders throughout the year. Phased budget versus actual reports have been implemented for schools, departments, research centres and subsidiary companies. The Prevero system now sources data from Agresso to inform financial reporting and financial planning. Standard operating procedure ownership is in place, and cross-training within teams supports contingency management. The introduction of a ticket system for all Finance Systems Queries has been a welcomed addition to the Finance Office, with a knowledge bank of reference notes for DCU staff available on the Finance Systems helpdesk. The presence of the Director of Finance on the IS Governance committee facilitates discussion and monitoring of progress on financial IT systems development with the Director of ISS.

Client Perspective

The centralised procurement team of the University remains the interface point between the DCU community and the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) and Education Procurement Service (EPS), supporting the DCU purchasing community. The Fees Office have extended their opening hours to facilitate student queries, particularly during term time. Their involvement in the SIS project has increased their interactions with Registry, and both teams meet during the Registration lifecycle to review, discuss, highlight and action areas of concern.

Finance Office Perspective

A quarterly presentation has been introduced, given to all Finance Office staff by the Finance Senior Management Team, outlining updates and developments to them. Cross-team involvement in a number of transformation projects is a conduit for facilitating interactions between operational teams, and skills development is being supported in a number of ways, including bespoke training sessions, professional qualifications and engagement in HR Learning and Development programmes.

4.2 Areas Remaining

The detailed assessment by the PRG is provided in Section 5. There are some areas raised in the last PRG report and subsequent quality improvement plan which need to be addressed further, including: business communications between operational teams; wider stakeholder engagement for process changes and associated systems training initiatives; and the effectiveness of the student-facing enquiries function during registration. With regard to the latter point, the PRG notes that the recent Registry quality review recommends that the links between the different fees and Registry processes are examined to determine if they are serving the student and University in the most efficient way.

5 Findings of the Peer Review Group

5.1 Further Improving the Customer Service Culture

Observations

The PRG **commends** the resilience of the Finance Office, during a period of pandemic, institutional growth and finance system and process improvements. As a team there has been a focus on 'getting the job done' and the achievements of the Finance Office are clear to the University and the PRG. There is now an opportunity to add to that success by improving the customer service culture for students and staff. This aligns very much with the University's strategic philosophy of People First, Focus and Impact.

Throughout this review the PRG has encountered enthusiastic engagement from University governors, colleagues and students, very willing to tell us about their experience with the Finance Office. In every meeting there were a lot of positive comments particularly from senior university managers, who can pick up the phone to senior finance colleagues to discuss finance issues. Students also commented on the speed of email responses and the timely payment of student stipends.

However, the PRG found some instances of customer service experiences, by colleagues below the senior team level, or involving complex student fee queries, that could be improved by embedding a stronger culture of customer service throughout the team. It is evident that although Finance teams have put in place mechanisms for answering queries, providing training etc., formal feedback mechanisms are required to check the quality of the interaction and whether the materials or responses have met the staff / student needs. KPIs may exist to monitor the frequency of queries addressed, but the PRG discussions with staff confirmed that, with the exception of the Accounts Payable unit, understanding and modifying the effectiveness of the communications (where appropriate) was not a standard part of the process.

Some communications with stakeholders were not deemed effective as Finance staff did not have a full understanding of the roles of their fellow functional unit staff (e.g. in relation to systems usage) - so if they could not solve the issue, staff and students were passed to other colleagues without knowing if they would be able to resolve the issue, leaving matters unresolved. The PRG were informed of the confusion caused by the different Agresso user views, where Finance colleagues were working on the back office Agresso system, answering staff user finance queries based on these screens, while staff users could not understand the responses as they were working off the web view.

The PRG were given examples of colleagues emailing with queries that had arisen when non-finance colleagues were struggling to follow the training manual, only to be advised by email to follow the training manual. There were also instances where system modules were implemented, but training and process changes were only announced at the end of the process, without key stakeholders having been informed of the work or having the consequences of the impact to them assessed. This was commented on by both Finance and non-Finance staff.

Like any University, student registration at the start of term can be a challenging time, due to the volume of students being processed in such a short timescale. The students we met did speak of their frustration linked to their interaction with the Finance Office, predominantly in relation to their tuition fees. These included:

- Not knowing where the Fees office was, often going to Registry in the first instance to then be directed to Finance.
- Only being able to correspond by the general fees email address.
- The same issues relating to the application of bursary/scholarship/ fee waiver to tuition fees occurring to individuals in each successive year of registration.
- An SU elected officer trying to deal with queries on behalf of students, but again only having access to Finance via the general fees email.

As mentioned previously the PRG also heard positive comments in relation to business / budget advice, however these were predominantly between more senior members of the University community, who

could pick up the phone and interact with Finance colleagues. In particular the service to students and colleagues below the Faculty / Professional Service Director level could benefit more from Finance colleagues putting themselves in the position of the colleague / student, when thinking about how best to communicate with them and taking ownership to resolve their issues. The PRG recognises that this is as much a cultural challenge for the Finance Office as a process change.

Recommendations

Improve the culture of consistent high quality customer service to staff and students

The PRG recommends the further development of a customer service ethos, where Finance staff put themselves in the position of their customers and ensure that their approach is solution focused. Consideration may be given to:

- The Finance team receiving training to develop a more customer centric approach.
- Developing feedback loops for training / query processes and ensuring improvements suggested by users are incorporated in a timely manner.
- Developing Finance KPIs to incorporate quality measures in addition to volume / time metrics
- Developing an effective Finance 'who's who' directory, so non finance colleagues and students know who to contact.

Training / communication plans should be incorporated in any systems development, with key stakeholders notified of the programme of work at the start of the project

This would assist in highlighting any potential roadblocks or pinch-points from the outset, and facilitate a smoother implementation.

Consideration should be given to improving the quality of the student experience in relation to engagement with the Finance Office and other departments

Noting that additional resource is unlikely to be available, this may include:

- Improving engagement with the SU Elected Officer supporting students experiencing difficulties with their fees.
- Considering other methods of communications with students aside from the generic email for complex cases.
- Making the registration process easier for students, e.g. signposting where the Fees Office is, ensuring the service is open all day, co-locating fees and registry staff during the registration period.
- Continuing to engage with Staff-Student forums, which are facilitated by the Quality Promotions Office.

5.2 Enhancement to Financial Systems Training

Observations

Two of the prioritised recommendations from the last Finance Quality Review were to (a) develop and include formal systems training as a crucial part of staff induction, and develop other initiatives to continually up-skill staff on systems used in the normal course of their job, and (b) to extend the use of the technology already available within the Finance Office (e.g. Agresso Financial system). In the intervening years, it is clear that significant resources have been invested in the acquisition and upgrade of financial systems. The PRG **commends** the effort of Finance Office staff in implementing these systems in tandem with their day-to-day workload. The significant involvement of the Finance Office in the ongoing Student Information System (SIS) programme is also acknowledged.

While the capability of financial systems has increased, the usability of those systems requires some additional work. Training and increased awareness of finance systems were aspects identified in the previous review, and this is an area that requires continuous enhancement in parallel with investment in technology. In the Finance Office Staff SWOT analysis, staff identified that Agresso itself is not an intuitive system and still requires a lot of manual workarounds and support. Staff recognised a need for

more focus on (a) training new finance staff on financial systems, and (b) refresher training for staff to build more expertise within teams, so that staff have a colleague to seek advice from if they are experiencing challenges. It was also acknowledged that staff need to be able to use systems better for reporting purposes, so there is a need for more systems training to enhance staff effectiveness and meet working needs over time.

These observations were reflected in the PRG meetings with Finance staff and with DCU staff stakeholders. Finance staff recognised the importance of systems training both within and across their functional units, in order to improve their professional understanding. There is also a willingness to provide training materials in a user-friendly format to academic and professional support staff. While staff stakeholders acknowledge that direct training opportunities are provided to staff by some functional units (e.g. Research Finance provide interactive training a couple of times a year), there is a general requirement to look both at the level that training is pitched at, and at increasing knowledge of the wider context for the user. One comment from the staff stakeholder meetings was that “users know what to click and when to click but beyond that have no understanding”. Initial training through core elements of the finance systems would be beneficial to new staff - the finance training manuals are quite heavy reading for this cohort. In some cases, University support staff have developed their own local financial systems training and resources to bridge that training gap.

Understanding of the multiple system user views is key in order for Finance functional units to provide appropriate training and associated materials for staff stakeholders. The variety of views from back office to end user can lead to academic staff sometimes avoiding using the systems as it can be “too challenging”.

It is clear from the meeting with the Finance Senior Management Group that automation of processes and reporting will continue to be a key element of the finance transformation agenda. The expectation is that greater systemisation provides capacity for added value work, and this will be to the benefit of staff stakeholders. The PRG **commend** the critical examination of what is possible within current versions of software, so as to utilize their full functionality. The PRG also **commend** the appointment of the two finance transformation roles to drive forward future financial systems projects.

In meetings with staff stakeholders, the benefits of automation of processes are already being felt in some areas, notably as regards the Core suite. However, concerns were raised that systemisation may reduce the connection with staff, leading to “faceless” services that are limited in terms of personal interaction. Some stakeholders felt that there was not sufficient briefing or lead-in time regarding the introduction of new systems or upgrades which directly impacted on their own unit operations.

The PRG believes that further investment in financial systems training will facilitate the finance transformation agenda in the long term. By empowering finance staff and DCU staff stakeholders to utilise the systems more effectively, this will create additional finance resource time to be assigned to advisory, business partner activities that add value for the DCU community.

Recommendations

Consider developing a staff training forum with system “super-users”

The PRG recommends active and ongoing consultation with system “super-users” outside of the Finance Office to share their knowledge. Many have built up significant expertise in training staff stakeholders, using non-financial language to explain the processes. Developing a staff training forum with this cohort would inform training plans, and facilitate peer review of proposed training material formats with targeted stakeholders to ensure they meet end user requirements.

Introduce tailored systems training so that stakeholders at all levels fully benefit from the additional system capabilities

For Finance staff, this should include training across functional units so they have a more complete understanding of how a complex system is utilised. In line with the DCU Operating Framework, end to end service ownership should be clear, including ownership of the processes that sit within a service.

For staff stakeholders, this should be tailored to the different categories of users, reflecting their particular usage needs. The Finance System Helpdesk is an important source of data regarding systems issues experienced by customers - this should inform training areas routinely requiring support. The PGR would also suggest surveying the different groups of users to gain specific knowledge on the issues relevant to each cohort.

5.3 Improving Financial Understanding Throughout the Institution

Observations

The PRG notes that the Finance Office is held in high regard across all levels of the university and are seen as experts in their field of knowledge, and the PRG **commend** Finance for this. The PRG also notes, however, a number of comments in the feedback from the various focus groups to the effect that there was room for improvement in financial understanding across the organisation.

The executive summary of the SAR states: *“Our stakeholders.... would like the Finance Office to continue to give a greater understanding of the financial information particularly as it relates to the future student profile of the university”*. Some of the weaknesses summarised in the SAR SWOT include: *There could be more transparency around how university funds are allocated between schools and how different activities impact on the budgets. Schools would like to understand which programmes are profitable and which are not. Management accounts are available at a high level, but it would be helpful to have an understanding of allocation of costs at lower levels. Faculties do not always understand what determines the annual budget and cannot see the impact of improved performance.*

The SAR SWOT also acknowledges the following as a weakness: *Customer Service – greater empathy towards staff outside of Finance who may not be as knowledgeable on finance matters*. The same SWOT suggests the following opportunity: *Customer service training for staff – opportunities to build relationships with internal stakeholders – pick up the phone*. This ties in well with the current focus on ‘people’ in the President’s ‘Transitional Strategy’ from April 2021.

The SAR outlines the various communication methods and objectives in use by the Finance Office and references ‘the 7 c’s of communication’ (Clear, Concise, Concrete, Correct, Coherent, Complete, and Courteous, and suggests that one could also add Credible and Creative to make nine C’s). However, it was not clear to the PRG if there was any mechanism in place to check if information being provided by Finance was understood or acted on. The PRG believes the concept of understanding cannot be assumed or taken for granted but should be proactively addressed.

Financial understanding is dependent on effective communication between the Finance Office and non-finance staff. The communication of financial information can only be effective to the extent that it is fully understood by the intended audience. However, as in any field of expertise, financial staff often suffer from the ‘curse of knowledge’; i.e., they know their area so well it does not occur to them that others may not understand it. This can result in sub-optimal information being provided or information not resulting in necessary actions due to lack of understanding.

The PRG acknowledges the challenge of multiple audiences for financial information across the university; one size may not fit all, as there are inevitably varying levels of (and need for) understanding. However, in the current context of so much uncertainty (e.g., the Covid pandemic) there is an even greater need to ensure all staff have a very good understanding of finances and financial consequences of decisions.

The PRG **commend** the Finance Office for their ‘can do’ approach and their desire to provide an excellent customer service, as evidenced in feedback from the Finance management and staff focus groups. It is noted that ‘Enhancing Financial Information Reporting’ is one of the seven identified strategic objectives in the Finance Office Strategic Plan. It is in the interest of the Finance Office to maximise the effectiveness of this approach and to build on the regard and standing in which Finance is held across the university.

Responding to a question during the PRG visit: “We try to use ordinary English, and to make our reports digestible. In communicating with our leadership committees, many individuals may not be from a financial background, and we need to ensure there is understanding of our reporting to a broader audience.” By contrast, comments from focus group feedback included: “Finance staff are very expert in their field, but financial 'speak' may not always be fully understood by academics... and perhaps Finance might need to take account of this.”

Finance staff, understandably, tend to use finance terminology / jargon / accounting-speak (e.g., ‘fund account basis’, ‘GAAP accounting basis’) which may not always be readily understood by non-finance staff. It is also possible, following the incorporation project in recent years, that staff from other organisations which have now merged with DCU may have the added complication of not being familiar with any DCU-specific finance-speak.

A better level of understanding of financial information by non-finance staff across the university would further enhance their confidence in the Finance Office. In turn this should lead to more acceptance or buy-in for both strategic and operational decisions and their associated financial implications.

Recommendations

The PRG **recommends** a twin track approach to improving financial understanding across the university – i.e., working within the Finance Office (the information providers) and working with non-finance staff (the information receivers). Staff across all sub-sections within Finance could be encouraged to take ownership of this drive to improve financial understanding, to ensure it is not just a top-level management aspiration.

Consideration should be given to assigning managerial responsibility for encouraging continuous improvement in communications, in order to enhance the level of financial understanding throughout DCU

The PRG suggests that consideration be given to assigning responsibility to one of the Finance Office management team (possibly on a rotating basis) for encouraging continuous improvement in communications to enhance the level of financial understanding throughout DCU. This might take the form of an assignment to review and improve one aspect of communications (or one topic) in a given timeframe. Finance staff may benefit from a workshop bringing staff together to discuss aspects of ‘clear communication’, improving external understanding of our outputs and bringing our ‘customers’ with us. Policy documents and other explanatory communications from Finance should be kept under review. The nature of any pattern of misunderstandings arising could be reviewed to see why and what can be done to mitigate them.

Further consideration should be given to providing training in ‘finance for non-finance staff and management’

On the other side of the communication equation, further consideration should be given to providing training in ‘finance for non-finance staff and management’. This could cover both how the finance department operates as well as the detail of DCU’s overall finances and department specific finances. Non-finance staff may benefit from, and be interested in, a basic guide on how the finances of the university work. A publication from the British University Finance Directors’ Group in 2019, see <https://www.bufdg.ac.uk/understanding-finance/>, provides an interesting model for such a guide.

5.4 Further Enhancing Finance Team Knowledge and Capabilities

Observations

It is apparent to the PRG that there is a very significant level of knowledge and capability within the Finance team. Finance is held in high regard both in the university and externally and there is a considerable level of trust and confidence expressed by key stakeholders in the key activities it undertakes.

The PRG **commends** the considered development of the capabilities of the Finance team in line with the changes in scale and complexity of DCU. The PRG also recognises the significant improvements of systems and processes within the Finance team that have in turn further enhanced the quality of service to the stakeholder. These improvements are ongoing with a clear plan of continuous process improvement in place.

The PRG was impressed by the quality of the SAR and **commends** the level of honest and constructive engagement by the Finance team in the quality review process, which spoke to us of a high functioning team. In addition, the PRG recognises the hard work and the high levels of adaptability and resilience required to successfully navigate the pandemic and provide a seamless service while working from home.

The PRG did note that there were tensions expressed within certain areas of the team regarding resourcing levels and recognition. The views were also expressed that there could be more scope for development of staff members, with subsequently more opportunities for promotion. The PRG acknowledged the new specialist expertise recently recruited, but did not identify a strong emphasis on the development of existing, more long standing staff.

In addition, the PRG recognised that there was a gap in levels of perception between the senior management team and the next levels of the team on issues such as team communication, resourcing, recognition and staff development.

The issue of ownership also arose within the external stakeholder groups. There was a feeling expressed that Finance staff know about their area, but will not have a sense of what other colleagues do within the Department. This issue becomes problematic when a problem arises that requires input from multiple areas of the Finance team and as no one area owns the issue it can fall through the cracks. The PRG also noted that in its engagement with the Finance team there was a feeling expressed that they were very busy and could only focus on what was in front of them.

Recommendations

Establish a Department Communications Framework

The PRG acknowledges that there are department meetings every quarter and also various ad hoc team meetings. However, there is a strong feeling conveyed to the PRG that communication is from the top down and that there is little scope to make suggestions or voice opinions. The PRG recommends the continuation of the Department meetings and implementing a formal communications framework at the levels below senior management. There may be an opportunity for the Line Managers at the level below Senior Management to meet as a group with the objective of enabling cross-functional communication. This group would in turn need to feed into the senior management team so that communication can be enabled from bottom up as well as top down.

Use the Performance Review & Development (PRD) scheme as an effective development tool

This is an area already identified by the Finance team within the SAR. The scheme is designed to support excellence in employee and organisational performance and will help staff to better understand how they contribute to and support the delivery of the University strategy through their individual and team responsibilities. The scheme should be used to identify development opportunities and pathways for staff members as well as providing recognition and value for what they do. It can also be used to provide more

awareness for how a staff member's role fits into the larger team and in turn can create a broader cross-functional awareness.

Conduct a Training Needs Analysis and identify development pathways

The PRG recommends that a training needs analysis for roles should be conducted in conjunction with the Learning & Development function. Such an exercise can identify skill gaps and subsequently can lead to the formulation of training plans. It may also lead to the identification of potential development pathways within certain roles or teams. Overall, such an exercise should lead to an honest conversation about individual and collective capabilities within the team.

In addition, this exercise needs to place specific emphasis on succession planning at senior management levels to ensure the required expertise is in place following the retirements of senior staff.

Emphasise Cross Functional Knowledge Sharing

The PRG acknowledges the volume and complexity of work undertaken by the Finance team, but also identifies the potential cross functional knowledge gap. The PRG recommends that more emphasis needs to be placed on improving cross-functional knowledge. One suggestion in this area could be the temporary assignment of finance colleagues to different areas of the team or if applicable, different areas of the University. There could also be the possibility of cross-training for certain areas. In addition, it might be useful to undertake specific team and/or department training in which particular service scenarios are mapped out which affect multiple areas of the Department. There may be other approaches best known to the Finance team, but an emphasis needs to be placed on the sharing of knowledge and understanding of what each area does and how this can further enhance the service provision.

5.5 Optimising the Use of Financial Data to Drive Improved Financial Performance and Aid Decision-Making

Observations

The quality and visibility of financial information for the University as a whole and for the different areas was a matter that arose in many of the PRG's sessions with the various stakeholders. It is fair to say that, at the highest levels, there is considerable trust, confidence and satisfaction with the financial information produced and presented. This was clearly evident in our discussions with the President, Senior Executive and members of the Governing Body. It is also clear from these discussions that the information is highly regarded and trusted by external bodies such as the external auditors, banks and financial institutions. The trust and confidence in the information, service and advice provided by Finance can be something the team can rightly be proud of. We **commend** the Finance Office for the level of trust and confidence they have built up over the years.

The key role of the Finance Office in determining and delivering the University's Strategy was another area that was highlighted to us, both in the written material and our meetings with the higher levels of the University. In addition, their management and leadership of the commercial companies, and their contribution to the University, were also highlighted to us as highly significant and beneficial. The Finance Office is **commended** for their efforts and commitment in these areas.

It is apparent to the PRG that the quality of information provided has improved dramatically over the last number of years, much of it driven by enhanced financial IT systems. The Finance Office is **commended** for their energy and commitment in delivering enhanced IT systems to support the University. This has been recognised within DCU with Finance Office personnel shortlisted for the President's Innovation Award in 2020 for the Prevero project.

It is also clear to the PRG that, at levels below higher management in the university, there is an appetite for further information, particularly on the contribution made by each faculty and school to the overall university. While such appetite for information might be considered healthy, organisations should always

be wary of the rationale for such information requests. In many instances this information could lead to infighting and false reporting unless the audience clearly understands the information being reported and the full context in which the university operates. An example might be that a particular faculty or school might not be contributing financially as much as others but for very good reasons the university needs and wishes to operate such activities. There will always be programmes or research areas that have important non-financial benefits for the University and these need to be recognised and understood.

In the time available to us, we did not fully understand the level of work underway on analysis of costs and income by faculty, school, programme, course, etc. The SAR speaks of “ongoing work on the financial contribution of individual programmes under strategic goal three of the original strategic plan ‘Income and Cost review’”. The Finance Office’s Strategic Plan talks of “Understanding better the cost & income base” and “enhancing financial information reporting”. From our sessions, with the various stakeholders, it was not clear to us how far advanced this work is nor who in the University was aware of it or had seen it. However, we believe that it is a key area for the Finance Office to continue to focus on and enhance. This is also true of the work being undertaken on the best student profile for the future.

The PRG believes there are opportunities to enhance and widen the scope of future financial planning in the University. The Finance Office, and in particular the Finance Director, are **commended** for the excellent detailed work that was done on the future financial planning model as part of the Universities’ applications for significant loans. However, this would appear to have been a one-off exercise with regular future financial plans not prepared on a formal basis. The PRG totally understands the difficult context in which the University operates and that significant time and effort are spent on the annual budgetary process. In addition, we understand the context in which much of the University’s income is dependent on Government policy with no multi-year planning/budgets provided by the Government. In a changing environment in which Universities are expected to raise more of their own revenue, with matching funds requirements for capital projects, the PRG believes financial planning will become more important in the future.

The PRG **commend** the Finance Office for the manner in which they control and manage the budgetary process, ensuring that the University continues to be financially sustainable on an annual basis. This created the framework in which the University was able to withstand the impact of the pandemic.

The PRG noted that the Finance Office SWOT analysis included the opportunity to be well positioned for specific calls for Research funding, ensuring a sustainable funding model and co-funding capital programmes by at least 50%. In reviewing the documentation available to the PGR it was not clear how future financial challenges are addressed in the University.

Recommendations

The Finance Office should continue with its programme of understanding and evaluating the costs and income of the University by faculty, School, programme, etc

This could be done at a contribution level without allocating central costs such as Finance, HR, etc unless those costs can be directly attributed to a particular activity or programme. This information could be shared and understood with, at the very least, the SMG with consideration given to sharing it at lower levels. This is very different information to that provided in the management accounts and would enable a clearer understanding at senior management levels of the finances of the University.

The University, driven by the Finance Office, should consider regularly updating financial plans and forecasting for the next 5-year cycles

While PRG appreciates the financial context in which the University works, we believe that regular formal planning could greatly assist the SMG and Governing Body to more fully understand the financial position, have a clearer understanding of the opportunities and risks and create a platform for future strategic thinking for the university. The PRG does not underestimate the level of work undertaken for the loans application but believes that a regular updating of the plan could be beneficial, particularly in relation to understanding incremental increases to the cost base, resource implications associated with

the implementation of the new strategy and creating financial headroom to support research and capital grant bids. It would appear as if IT developments in recent years might provide the tools for doing this more regularly. This is also in line with the Finance Office Strategy of “Providing management information for enhanced decision making”.

The University, driven by the Finance Office, should evaluate the level of information that might be appropriate to share at various levels of the organisation

There is an appetite for financial information across many levels in the University. Personnel should at the very least have the information necessary for their role to be effective. Additional information may be useful to assist personnel to better understand the workings of the University. Any information provided should be accompanied by clear information and education to the recipients as to what the information means and the context in which the information is being shared. Managerial levels should have a good understanding of the Universities Finances and a reasonable understanding of their own unit’s finances and contribution to the University. This may not always be purely a financial contribution. The PRG believes that sharing of more information could lead to better financial education and commitment to the University, and more considered discussions on the purpose, strategy and future of the University.

6 SWOT Analysis and Plans for Improvement

6.1 SWOT Analysis for Finance Office

The self-assessment report for the Finance Office included a proposed summary SWOT analysis. As a result of the Peer Review Group’s analysis of the self-assessment report, supporting documentation and findings from the peer review visit, we propose the following to be a true reflection of the capabilities and opportunities, and identified weakness and threats/challenges to future success.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ability to change in line with the significant scale and growth of DCU, restructuring as necessary and bringing in additional qualified resources. ● Held in high regard by those at the highest levels of the University and by key external stakeholders. ● Resilience of staff and provision of leadership in difficult times, not least during COVID. ● Knowledge and expertise of staff ● Supporting the significant and important growth of the DCU Commercial Group. ● Investment and delivery of IT systems improvements to support operational excellence. ● The strong financial control environment created by the Finance Office, a key requirement in any publicly funded organisation, including good control of the budgetary process and stewardship over the introduction of necessary policies to reflect Government legislation, regulations & Circulars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication of financial information to non-financial staff could be improved - need to tailor to stakeholders knowledge level in terms of language and tone used. ● Inconsistency in the quality of customer service provided to staff and students. ● Frequency of financial systems training and support for both staff and stakeholders, particularly for new personnel or new users. ● Greater institutional planning is required to determine best student profile and aligned growth plan ● The website needs to be updated to meet the information needs of stakeholders and provide clarity on points of contact. ● Inconsistency in the level of financial information being provided to different parts/levels of the University. This is not necessarily due to the Finance Office but may be due to decisions within other schools, faculties etc. as to whom they share information with.
Opportunities	Threats / Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New and enhanced IT systems provide opportunities for improving efficiencies and for releasing staff and managers to focus on strategic and customer service matters. ● More analysis, and subsequent sharing, of financial data would improve the financial understanding of those at the higher levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The retention of key staff and succession planning to ensure continuity of leadership and service provision. ● Cyber-crime and payment fraud: constant vigilance needed. ● Managing the ever changing and challenging financial environment in which universities operate.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular Strategic plans; a five year planning process could result in more considered discussions on the future direction and opportunities of the University. • Development of cross-team systems training and engagement to enhance the effectiveness of the functional teams. • Use of enhanced communication methods and channels, reflecting staff and stakeholder requirements, to improve information flow. • Building relationships with internal stakeholders for knowledge exchange (including staff-student forums). • Customer service training to continue to improve the culture of high quality customer service • Enhance commercial group potential to further cross-subsidise university activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the University has a sustainable funding model and can be competitive in research & capital funding calls. • Impact of improvement project resource requirements on the general staff workload (in absence of backfill) • Ensuring Finance staff remain 'change ready' for the ongoing University change agenda
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6.2 Plans for Improvement Identified by Finance Office

The PRG would first acknowledge the commitment of the Finance Office to provide a professional service to the University and to do so in an open and helpful manner. It is evident to us that the Finance Office is highly regarded, trusted and appreciated by the highest levels in the University. The advances made in service and technology since the last SAR in 2014 have been very significant and beneficial for the University.

The PRG recognises that the Finance Office has already identified many of the areas that we have commented on and made recommendations on in this report. The Finance Office understands the areas in which improvements and changes would both benefit themselves and the University in the future.

The PRG commend the Finance Office for their changes in structure in line with the changes in the University. In particular, the recent recruitment of the two Finance Transformation Roles is a positive step in ensuring a fit and proper finance structure for the future.

The PRG would agree in the main with the emerging themes and identified Areas of Improvement stated in Section 9 of the SAR. We will discuss them briefly here:

- **DCU Commercial Group / non-exchequer income growth**
The PRG would agree that this is an area to concentrate on in the future. We would also highlight that it is important that, in any examination of income generation, the student and other users of any services continue to be fairly treated.
- **Integration of Finance Office Services and Processes**
The PRG also agrees that in all growing and diverse organisations, opportunities to integrate processes should continually be evaluated.
- **Developing IT Systems / Training**
This is obviously a priority area for the Finance Office. Many IT developments have taken place over the last number years with many more, such as SIS, in the early stages. The PRG notes the many projects and enhancements planned, all of which we agree need to be progressed. Training in all systems has been raised as a concern by many users, both within and outside the Finance office. The PRG believes that the Finance Office needs to examine its training processes and ensure that users, whether new or existing, have the necessary and regular training to enable optimum use of systems.
- **Greater Understanding of Financial Information**
Again, this was an area highlighted to the PRG during meetings with the different stakeholders. Some recommendations have been made with regard to ensuring that all those involved in the budgetary process totally understand the process, rationale, etc. While the Finance Office

identifies this as being a need particularly for new appointees, the PRG believes there would be benefit in undertaking a budgetary process training exercise for all management and staff with any involvement in the process.

- **Understanding the income and cost base**

The PRG believes this is an area which should be prioritised. A deeper understanding of the finances of the University amongst the highest levels of the University could lead to better, more informed decision making in regard to the future of the University. A regular 5 year planning process could be very beneficial.

- **Customer Service**

The Finance Office recognises the need to build on the customer service to its stakeholders. The Finance Office also states that the new SIS will significantly enhance the service interface with students. While the PRG accept that the new system will enable better customer service, we believe that the Finance Office, and the University as a whole, needs to examine its interactions with students (via Fees, Registry, etc.) so that students can be more easily aware of where to go when any problems arise. SIS will not be totally operational for a number of years and in that context the PRG believes that the University should evaluate whether any short interim measures could be put in place to improve the customer service to students.

- **Website**

The Finance Office recognises that their website needs enhancement. This is in line with comments made to the PRG by several stakeholders. Proposed changes should be discussed with staff stakeholders to ensure that their needs are being met.

- **Finance Office Resources**

The PRG would agree with the Finance Office that the required professional skill sets are necessary, particularly as the University grows in size and complexity. We would also agree that a taxation resource would be beneficial. In tandem with that, the PRG believes that growth and opportunities are required for the existing staff in the Finance Office. The Finance Office should evaluate the extent to which opportunities for staff to partake in projects both inside and outside the Finance office are possible. In addition, the Finance Office should consider including Customer Service as a transformation priority and therefore may include it in the brief of the existing Transformation Manager roles or an additional role of similar nature.

In summary, the PRG would identify the following areas as priority areas:

- Improving customer service with all stakeholders, in particular students.
- Continuing with their planned IT projects, ensuring that all within Finance and those external users are sufficiently trained.
- Enhancing the understanding of the finances of the university and budgetary processes, particularly with greater detail at the higher levels of the University.
- Ensuring the Finance Office is fit for purpose in the future, including opportunities for those within the office to develop and progress. This includes ensuring succession planning for key roles.

7 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

No	Commendation	P	Level	
Further Improving the Customer Service Culture				

	Commendation			The resilience of the Finance Office, during a period of pandemic, institutional growth and finance system and process improvements.
Enhancement to Financial Systems Training				
	Commendation			The significant introduction of improved financial systems and processes, and the effort of Finance Office staff in implementing these systems in tandem with their day-to-day workload.
	Commendation			The critical examination of what is possible within current versions of software, so as to utilize their full functionality.
	Commendation			The appointment of the two transformation roles to drive forward future financial systems projects.
Improving Financial Understanding Throughout the Institution				
	Commendation			The Finance Office 'can do' approach and their desire to provide excellent customer service, as evidenced in feedback from the Finance management and staff focus groups.
	Commendation			Finance Office are held in high regard across all levels of the university and are seen as experts in their field of knowledge.
Further Enhancing Finance Team Knowledge and Capabilities				
	Commendation			The considered development of the capabilities of the Finance team in line with the changes in scale and complexity of DCU.
	Commendation			The level of honest and constructive engagement by the Finance Office in the quality review process.
Optimising the Use of Financial Data to Drive Improved Financial Performance and Aid Decision-Making				
	Commendation			The key role played by the Finance Office in the delivery of the university strategy.
	Commendation			The financial leadership of the successful commercial companies.
	Commendation			The trust and confidence in the information, service and advice provided by the Finance Office is something the team can rightly be proud of.
	Commendation			The energy and commitment in delivering enhanced IT systems to support the University.
	Commendation			The excellent detailed work that was done on the future financial planning model as part of the Universities applications for significant loans.
	Commendation			The control and management of the budgetary process, ensuring that the University continues to be financially sustainable on an annual basis.

No	Recommendation	P	Level	
Further Improving the Customer Service Culture				
1	Recommendation	P1	A	Improve the culture of consistent high quality customer service to staff and students.
2	Recommendation	P2	A	Training / communication plans should be incorporated in any systems development, with key stakeholders notified of the programme of work at the start of the project.
3	Recommendation	P1	A	Consideration should be given to improving the quality of the student experience in relation to engagement with the Finance Office and other departments.
Enhancement to Financial Systems Training				
4	Recommendation	P2	A	Consider developing a staff training forum with system "super-users".
5	Recommendation	P2	A	Introduce tailored systems training so that both Finance staff and DCU stakeholders at all levels fully benefit from the additional system capabilities.
Improving Financial Understanding Throughout the Institution				
6	Recommendation	P2	A	Consideration should be given to assigning managerial responsibility for encouraging continuous improvement in communications, in order to enhance the level of financial understanding throughout DCU.
7	Recommendation	P2	A	Further consideration should be given to providing training in 'finance for non-finance staff and management'.
Further Enhancing Finance Team Knowledge and Capabilities				
8	Recommendation	P1	A	Use the Performance Review & Development (PRD) scheme as an effective development tool
9	Recommendation	P2	A	Establish a formal Department Communications Framework at levels below senior management
10	Recommendation	P2	A/U	Conduct a Training Needs Analysis and identify development pathways
11	Recommendation	P2	A/U	Emphasise Cross Functional Knowledge Sharing
Optimising the Use of Financial Data to Drive Improved Financial Performance and Aid Decision-Making				
12	Recommendation	P1	A	Continue with the programme of understanding and evaluating the costs and income of the University by faculty, School, programme, etc.
13	Recommendation	P2	A/U	Consider a formal 5 year planning process to update financial plans and forecasts incorporating plans to generate cash to support research and capital bids
14	Recommendation	P2	A/U	Evaluate the level of the financial (and non-financial) information that is appropriate to share with the various levels of the organisation, in order to enhance the understanding of the University's finances.

Appendices

Timetable Peer Review Group Visit

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Meeting No.
Day 1- Tuesday 25th May 2021		
1400-1415	Welcome and Clarifications with PRG	
1415-1545	Private meeting of the Peer Review group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	QPO Team <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aisling McKenna – Director 2. Celine Heffernan – Quality Officer 3. Fiona Dwyer – Quality Coordinator
1545-1600	Break	
1600-1700	Consideration of the SAR with the Area Head and members of the Quality Review committee.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ciaran McGivern, Director of Finance 2. Eamonn Cuggy, Senior Project Manager/SIS/GM DSPK 3. Jennifer O'Halloran, Controller Group Financial Operations 4. Kathryn Geraghty, Assistant Financial Controller 5. Brendan Blake, Insurance Manager 6. Robbie Walsh, Payroll Manager 7. Andrew Brady, Accounts Payable Manager 8. Eileen O'Keefe, Procurement Officer 9. Fiona Maguire, Financial Planning Accountant 10. John Morrissey, Research Accountant 11. Susan McClean, Finance Systems Administrator 12. Louise Skelly, Fees Supervisor 13. Yvonne Murray, Accounts Payable Analyst & Compliance Support
1700	Close of session	

Day 2- Wednesday 26 th May 2021		
0845-0900	Private Meeting Time for PRG	
0900-0945	Members of FINANCE OFFICE Management Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ciaran McGivern - Director of Finance 2. John Kilcoyne - Deputy Director of Finance 3. Anthony Feighan - Head of Financial Planning and Research 4. Jennifer O'Halloran - Controller Group Financial Operations 5. Martin Lynch - Group Financial Controller
0945-1000	Break/ PRG Meeting time	
1000-1045	Finance Team Members- Finance Operations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Robbie Walsh, Payroll Manager 2. Andrew Brady, Accounts Payable Team Lead 3. Deirdre Kelly, Fees and Accounts Receivable Manager 4. Eileen O'Keefe, Procurement Officer 5. Eva Abahaziova, Payroll Administrator 6. Anastassia Zahharova, Accounts Payable Assistant 7. Laura Masterson, Fees Supervisor 8. Brendan Blake, Insurance Manager 9. Caroline Groome, Accounts Receivable Assistant
1045-1100	Break/ PRG Meeting time	
1100-1145	Finance Team Members- Financial Reporting, Research Reporting & Financial Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fergus Geraghty, Finance Transformation Manager – Reporting & Treasury 2. Audrey Barter, Research Accounting and Reporting Manager 3. Stephen Mulvany, Capital Projects Manager 4. Damian Dowdall, Trispace Financial Controller 5. Gerry Whelan, Project Accountant 6. Kathryn Geraghty, Assistant Financial Controller 7. Stephen Kiernan, General Ledger Accountant 8. Ramya Bhat, Research Finance Accountant 9. Orla Cahill, Financial Planning Accountant
1145-1230	PRG Meeting with Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conor Cassidy – Business School (1st Year) 2. Kate Goodman – Incoming SU Vice-President for Academic Affairs (2021/22) & former Faculty Representative 3. Dean O'Reilly – Returning SU Vice-President for Wellbeing (2021/22), Faculty of Science & Health Graduate 4. Christina O'Keefe, Postgraduate Research Student (Scholarship – DCU Educational Trust) 5. Finbar Horgan, Postgraduate Research Student, Institute of Education 6. Rukayat Raji (Ruka) – Access Student, Final Year, Faculty of Science & Health
1230-1330	PRG Private Meeting time	

Day 3- Thursday 27 th May 2021		
0845-0915	Private Meeting Time for PRG to plan morning meetings	
0915-1015	External Perspectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Caroline McMullan, Professor of Business & Society- School of Business (PNU) 2. Eilish McLoughlin, Associate Professor of Physics – School of Physical Sciences 3. Joe Travers, Associate Professor School of Inclusive and Special Education IOE 4. Sarah Jane Belton, Associate Professor Physical Education and Head of School of Health and Human Performance 5. Martin Crane, Professor in School of Computing 6. Martin Brown, Associate Professor in School of Policy and Practice 7. John Judge, Head of Research Development - ADAPT 8. Prof. Mark Brown, Director, National Institute for Digital Learning 9. Amy Murphy, Research Accountant, Insight
1015-1030	Break/ PRG Meeting time	
1030-1130	External Perspectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Norma Wilkinson, HR Manager – Operations and Data Reporting 2. Adolfo Rey Garcia, Estates – Capital Projects Manager 3. Michele Pringle, Faculty Manager Engineering and Computing 4. Brian Bates, Trispace General Manager 5. Hazel Langan, Senior Faculty Assistant - Faculty Humanities and Social Sciences 6. Caroline Loscher, School Support Administrator, Institute of Education 7. Darren Myler, Curriculum and Student Registration Manager, Registry 8. Paul Smith, International Director, International Office 9. Ian Spillane, Service Delivery Manager ISS 10. Ross Munnely, Director of Alumni Relations 11. Cathy McLoughlin, Access Office, SS&D
1130-1200	Private PRG Meeting Time	
1200-1230	Follow meeting with FINANCE OFFICE Director	Ciaran McGivern Finance Director
1230-1300	Meeting with members from the DCU Governing Authority Membership	DCU Governing Authority Membership Terence O'Rourke James Corcoran
1300-1330	Private meeting time	

Day 4- Friday 28th May 2021

Day 4- Friday 28 th May 2021		
0845-0900	PRG Meeting time	
0900-1000	Meeting with DCU Senior Management Team	1.Prof. Daire Keogh (President, DCU) 2.Prof. Anne Sinnott (Deputy President) 3.Prof. Lisa Looney (Vice-President Academic Affairs / Registrar) 4.Prof. Greg Hughes (Vice-President, Research & Innovation) 5.Dr. Declan Raftery (Chief Operations Officer) 6.Prof. Derek Hand (Acting Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences) 7.-Prof. Barbara Flood, Professor of Accounting DCUBS on behalf of the Dean. 8. Prof. Michelle Butler (Executive Dean, Faculty of Science & Health) 9.Prof. Brian Corcoran (Acting Executive Dean, Faculty of Engineering & Computing) 10.Prof. Anne Looney (Executive Dean, Institute of Education)
1000-1045	Meeting with DCU President	Prof. Daire Keogh (President, DCU)
1045-1100	Break	
1100-1230	PRG Meeting time	
1230-1300	Break	
1300-1320	Exit Presentation	All Finance Staff
1320-1400	PRG Private Meeting time	