

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement  
Programme for Administrative Units  
2006-2007



Peer Review Group Report  
for the Office of the Vice-President  
for Learning Innovation/Registrar

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## 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). 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. The Unit is given the chance to correct possible factual errors before the Peer Group Report (PGR) is finalised.
4. The Unit produces a draft Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP) in response to the various issues and findings of the SAR and PGR Reports.
5. The PGR and the Unit draft QuIP are considered by the Quality Promotion Committee.
6. The draft QuIP is discussed in a meeting between the Unit, members of the Peer Group, the Director of Quality Promotion and Senior Management. The University's responses are written into the QuIP, and the result is the finalised QuIP.
7. A summary of the PRG Report, the QuIP and the Executive Response is sent to the Governing Authority of the University, who will approve publication in a manner that they see fit.

This document is the report referred to in Step 3 above

The Peer Review Group should note that, in agreement with the other Irish universities, following approval by the Governing Authority, of the Summary document referred to in Step 7 above, the document will be published on the university website.

Following publication of the above-mentioned summary document, the Quality Promotion Unit will also make the following publicly accessible on the QPU website:

- The *full text* of the Peer Review Group Report (the document referred to in step 3 above)
- The *full text* of the School Quality Improvement Plan (the document referred to in step 6 above)

The Review Group should bear in mind therefore that their report will become a public document. However, as the Self-Assessment Document remains confidential (to the School, the QPU, the Peer Review Group and the Senior Officers), the PRG Report should be capable of being read as a stand-alone document.

The Review Group Report (and the Self-Assessment Report) will be used by the Unit as a start point for the preparation of the Quality Improvement Plan. The recommendations in the above reports will form the basis for any funding submissions to the University and the Higher Education Authority for quality improvement. It is therefore vital that all reports contain clear recommendations for improvement.

## **Format of the Review Group Report**

(Throughout this documentation, the term Unit is used to refer to the organisational structure under review, OVPLI)

### **1. The Unit**

#### **Location of the Unit**

OVPLI is distributed over a number of locations on campus. The Vice-President for Learning Innovation and Registrar and her Personal Assistant, as well as Academic Affairs and most of the Learning Innovation Unit staff, are located in the Postgraduate Residences Building. The LIU also has a presence in the Oscail Building. The Registry is located in the Henry Grattan extension. Most of the Student Affairs offices are currently located in the Pavilion Building, but they will shortly move to a centralised location in the Henry Grattan Building. INTRA is currently located in the Invent Centre, but is due to move to the Henry Grattan Building.

#### **Staff**

#### **Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation (OVPLI)**

**Vice-President:** Maria Slowey

PA – Gráinne Curran

- **Student Affairs** 28 Staff
- **INTRA** 8 Staff
- **Academic Affairs** 2 Staff
- **Learning Innovation Unit** 6.5 Staff
- **Registry** 26 Staff

#### **Student Affairs: (28) Staff Details**

Director of Student Affairs,

Administrative Assistant Grade 4 Permanent

Administrative Assistant: Grade 4, Permanent

Careers Service:

Head of Careers Service Admin 2, Permanent

Careers Service Admin 1, Permanent

Grade 2 Secretaries x 2 Permanent

FÁS Community Employment Staff x 2 part-time Temporary, No grade given, employed through a Community Employment Scheme.

#### **Chaplaincy Service**

Head Chaplain Admin 2, Permanent

Chaplaincy Assistant Grade 1, Temporary

Part-time Chaplain 15 hours per week No Grade given, Temporary, paid by the hour

Full-time Chaplain Grade 4, Temporary

#### **Counselling Service:**

Head of Counselling Service Admin 2, Permanent

Counsellor Admin 1, Permanent

Counsellor 10 hours per week No Grade given, Temporary, paid by the hour.

Grade 2 Secretary Temporary works half time for Counselling and half time for Student Affairs).

**Health Service:**

Head Nurse Grade 4, Permanent  
Grade 2 Secretary Permanent  
2 x .5 Agency Nurses paid by the hour through nursing agency,  
Supported by a team of Doctors from Glasnevin Family Practice  
1 Part-time Physiotherapist & Psychiatrists

**Sports and Recreation Service:**

Sports and Recreation Officer Admin 1, (This person is temporary, covering maternity leave, the post is permanent)  
Permanent Grade 2 Secretary, – works half time for Sports & Recreation Service and half time for Student Activities

**Student Activities:**

Student Activities Officer Grade 4, Temporary  
Grade 2 Secretary Temporary – works half time for Sports & Recreation Service and half time for Student Activities

**Student Financial Assistance**

Financial Assistance Administrator Grade 4, Permanent  
Grade 2 Secretary, Temporary - works half time for Counselling and half time for Student Affairs)

**International Office:**

Head of International Office (Vacant, Lecturer has been appointed on a 3 year contract (above bar), Temporary  
Assistant International Officers x 3 (Grade 4), 2 Permanent and 1 Temporary  
International Information Co-ordinators X 2 (Grade 2), 1 Permanent and 1 Temporary  
Co-ordinators x 2  
FÁS Community Employment Staff x 2 part-time (No grade given, Temporary, one contract finishing the week of the review

**INTRA (8) Staff Details**

(Admin 2) Permanent  
Co-ordinator (Grade 5) ( Formerly permanent IV (Faculty Science & Health) currently acting V (contract runs out April 2007 Was a permanent post but is now filled on a contract basis, no reason given for this action. Original post holder has left).  
(Grade 5) Permanent  
(Grade 5) Permanent  
Admin Assistant (Grade 4) Was a permanent post, currently filled on a yearly contract basis (Original post holder has left)  
Secretary 2) Permanent  
(Secretary 2) Permanent post but currently filled on a weekly basis by agency as post holder is on sick leave.  
Reception (Secretary 2) Permanent Invent post, not controlled by Intra.

**Academic Affairs (2) Staff Details**

Assistant Registrar (Admin 2)

(Grade 4) X1

**Learning Innovation Unit (6.5) Staff Details**

(Admin 2) Was temporary, approval now given for permanent post.

(Admin 1) Contract of indefinite duration

(Admin 1) Was temporary, approval now given for permanent post.

(Admin 1) Temporary, contract finished the week of the review and was not extended

(Secretary 2) Temporary

Admin 1 Temporary contract funded by National Digital Learning Repository

**Registry (26) Staff Details**

Director: **1**

Student Enrolment Team: **14.5**

Student Awards Team: **9.5**

Systems Development Officer: **1**

**Registry staff is made up of:**

Director (Administrator III) Vacant

Systems Development Officer (Permanent Administrator I, current post holder is on leave of absence, post covered on contract basis until Sept 2007)

Student Enrolment Manager (Permanent Administrator II)

Student Awards Manager (Permanent Administrator II)

Deputy Student Enrolment Manager (Senior Admin Assistant, Grade 5, current post holder is in Systems Development Officer role, Post filled on 7 month Contract)  
*months*

Deputy Student Awards Manager (Senior Admin Assistant, Grade 5) *3 year contract*

Assistant Enrolment Officer (Admin Assistant, Grade 4) (Permanent post holder on leave of absence post currently filled with 6 month contract)

Assistant Awards Officer, Postgraduate & External Examiners (Permanent Admin Assistant, Grade 4)

Assistant Awards Officer, Exams & Graduation (Admin Assistant, Grade 4)  
(Permanent post holder has 3 year contract at Grade 5, post currently filled with 3 year contract)

Senior Coordinator Postgraduate (Clerical Assistant, Grade 3) (Permanent post holder has other contract post within the University, post currently filled by 8 month contract)

Senior Coordinator Undergraduate Permanent (Clerical Assistant, Grade 3)

Senior Coordinator Customer Service (Clerical Assistant, Grade 3) (Permanent post holder has other contract post within the University, post currently filled by 11 month)

Senior Coordinator Exam Results (Permanent Clerical Assistant, Grade 3)

Senior Coordinator Invigilation & Graduation (Permanent Clerical Assistant, Grade 3)  
2 x Coordinators Postgraduate (Permanent Clerical Assistant, Grade 2, One post holder on maternity leave, post covered on a contract basis))

2 x Coordinators Undergraduate (Clerical Assistant, Grade 2) (Permanent post holder has other contract post within the University, post currently filled by six month contract, no details given for other post)

4.5 x Coordinators Customer Service (Clerical Assistant, Grade 2) (Two permanent post holder have other contract posts within the University, posts currently filled by one on 6 month temporary contract, the other on 9 month temporary contract, no details given for other posts).

2.5 x Coordinators Exams & Graduation (Clerical Assistant, Grade 2) (Two permanent post holder have other contract posts within the University, posts currently filled on a year contract basis. .5 post makes up part of a job share arrangement within Registry and is covered on a contract basis, no reasons given).

1 x Coordinator Postgraduate and External Examiners (Clerical Assistant, Permanent, Grade 2)

## **DETAILS OF THE UNIT**

The Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation and Registrar came into existence with the appointment of the Vice-President and Registrar in February 2004. Its current composition reflects a number of decisions taken in the period since 2003 with regard to the optimum reporting relationship for several central departments within the University. It now comprises (besides the Vice-President and Registrar and her Personal Assistant) five units: the Learning Innovation Unit (LIU), Academic Affairs, the Registry, Student Affairs and INTRA. The Registry is itself composed of two teams, Student Enrolment and Student Awards. Student Affairs is composed of eight sub-units (Careers Service, Chaplaincy Service, Counselling Service, Health Service, Sport and Recreation Service, Student Activities, Student Financial Assistance, International Office). While INTRA currently reports directly to the Vice-President and Registrar, it is intended that it will shortly become an additional unit within Student Affairs.

The Registry, Student Affairs and INTRA underwent Quality Reviews relatively recently (in the context of different structural arrangements from those which now apply). Because of this it was agreed, following consultation with the Chair of the Quality Promotion Committee and the Director of Quality Promotion, that these three units would, on this occasion, undergo a 'light-touch' review and would, instead of completing a full self-assessment report, summarise the progress achieved to date in

implementing the recommendations made by the various Peer Review Groups during the Quality Reviews while also highlighting any subsequent developments which might impact on their current activities and/or planning for future activities. It was further agreed that the Learning Innovation Unit and Academic Affairs would undergo a full quality review.

## **2. The Self-Assessment Process**

### **The OVPLI Co-ordinating Committee**

- Valerie Cooke (Academic Affairs), Secretary
- John Gilligan (Student Affairs)
- Kevin Griffin (Registry), Chair until February 2007
- Jean Hughes (Learning Innovation Unit)
- Maeve Long (INTRA)
- Louise McDermott (Academic Affairs), Chair from March 2007
- Professor Maria Slowey (Vice-President and Registrar).

### **Methodology Adopted**

This Committee met on the following occasions: 15 September 2006; 11 October 2006; 8 November 2006; 13 December 2006; 30 January 2007; 8 February 2007; 26 February 2007.

To ensure the engagement of all staff, a lunchtime meeting was hosted in the Helix on 18 October 2006 with presentations by Professor Slowey, Kevin Griffin and the Director of Quality Promotion. This provided an opportunity for people who might not normally have occasion to interact to learn more about one another's work and to welcome staff of INTRA as new colleagues to OVPLI. Each unit subsequently kept their own staff informed about the process. A full OVPLI lunchtime meeting, to provide a briefing on work completed to date and outline the preparations for the visit of the Peer Review Group, was held on 7 March 2007. Before the final edit of the report the committee secretary got CSD to create a shared drive that could be accessed only by the units within OVPLI. The documentation was put up on this drive. As the various units were preparing their sections, the Heads were requested to consult all staff and encourage them to engage in the drafting process. When the final version was ready, and after it had been submitted to the Quality Promotions Unit, a lunch and meeting for all OVPLI staff was held. The staff were given a hard copy of the overview section and requested to read this and, as a minimum, the section relating to their own unit (and, ideally, to read the whole thing). The Head of each section also then each gave a presentation to their own unit.

The PRG found the assessment to be somewhat top heavy, the Quality Co-ordinating Committee all held senior positions within the Unit, and all meetings of the PRG were with senior staff. While there may have been involvement of staff at all levels it was not visible.



The PRG found there was limited interaction between the Units of the OVPLI. Each Unit did its own report and it was subsequently put together and edited. While there was a template for the review which was followed for the LIU and Academic Affairs, there appeared to be no such template for the “light touch” reviews; each Unit approached the review in a different way and this was reflected in the SAR. Apart from the initial meeting there appeared to be limited involvement of the more junior staff in the process or in any of the meetings which were held with the PRG. However when some PRG members went on a tour of the facilities they did have the opportunity to meet some other staff from OVPLI then.

### **3. The Peer Review Group Process**

#### **The Peer Review Group**

- Dr. Caroline Hussey, Former Registrar, University College Dublin
- Hannele Niemi, Professor of Education, University of Helsinki
- Ms. Bernadette Farrell, USI Education Officer, Union of Students in Ireland
- Prof. John Costello, Senior Academic, Physics, Dublin City University
- Ms. Sheelagh Wickham, Lecturer, Internal Rapporteur, Dublin City University

#### **Site Visit Programme**

##### ***Day 1 (Wednesday 28 March 2007)***

Arrival of Peer Review Group

14.00 – 15.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group, Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion

15.00 – 16.00 Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days

16.00 – 17.30 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with OVPLI co-ordination committee including a short presentation.

19.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Director of Quality Promotion, Maria Slowey, Valerie Cooke, John Gilligan, Jean Hughes, Maeve Long, Louise McDermott, Phylomena McMorrow.

##### ***Day 2 (Thursday, 29 March 2007)***

09.00 – 10.00 PRG convenes in private session

Meetings between PRG and units from OVPLI, in turn  
VPLI/Registrar

10.00 – 10.30 LIU (all staff)

10.30 – 11.00 Academic Affairs (both staff members)

11.00 – 11.30 Registry (former Director plus senior staff)  
 11.30 – 12.00 Student Affairs (Director plus senior staff)  
 12.00 – 12.30 INTRA (Head plus senior staff)  
 12.30 – 13.00 PRG meet Director of QPU (if required)  
 13.00 – 14.00 Working (sandwich) lunch for PRG  
 14.00 - 17.00 Meetings with representative selections of stakeholder groups  
 14.00 – 14.15 Group A - INTRA employers  
 14.15 – 15.30 Group B - Deans, Associate Deans, Programme Chairs, Academic Council members including student members, Appeals Board members, academics involved with LIU, representatives of linked colleges  
 15.30 – 16.15 Group C - Faculty Administrators, Library, Computer Services Department, Finance Office  
 16.15 – 17.00 Group D –Students  
 19.30 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group

***Day 3 (Friday, 30 March 2007)***

09.00 – 10.00 Meeting with Senior Management Group ♦  
 Room: President’s Office, Albert College

♦ Members of the Senior Management Group are as follows;  
 President.....Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski  
 Deputy President.....Professor Anne Scott  
 Secretary.....Mr. Martin Conry  
 Vice-President for Learning Innovation.....Professor Maria Slowey  
*(Did not attend as the OVPLI was being reviewed)*  
 Vice-President for Research .....Professor Eugene Kennedy  
 Finance Director.....Mr. Frank Soughly  
 Human Resources Director.....Ms. Marian Burns

10.00 – 11.00 Tour of core facilities by PRG  
 11.15 – 12.00 Meeting with Head of Unit to clarify any outstanding issues  
 12.00 – 12.30 Brief Discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion (if required)  
 12.30 – 13.30 Working (sandwich) lunch for members of Peer Review Group  
 13.30 – 16.00 Preparation of 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of Final Report  
 16.00 – 16.30 Exit presentation to ALL staff of the Unit to be made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group

Overall it was a very full agenda for the two and a half days. The PRG felt that the time available for the meetings was quite short in view of the broad range of activities in the OVPLI. In this context it might be worth considering either a larger PRG in future with appropriate splitting of the work, perhaps along major unit lines. Alternatively, the PRG could work over a longer timeframe but it would undoubtedly be difficult to find PRG candidates who could commit say a full week to this exercise. If the former multiparallel track approach was adopted, the report structure would have to reflect the structure of the peer review group division across the OVPLI with individual reports available as appendices to a single OVPLI report. Staff were all very enthusiastic and open during meetings. There was a willingness to share and discuss issues relating to OVPLI. All staff, both internal and external to OVPLI were open and frank in discussion.

#### **4. Findings of the Review Group**

##### **Methodology**

The PRG received a very rich and informative collection of material from the DCU Quality Promotion Unit at the beginning of March. In addition to the Self-Assessment Report and Appendices, we were sent information on DCU and on Quality Assurance, in the context of Irish universities in general and of DCU in particular. This material was extremely well prepared and very useful.

Dr. Caroline Hussey was elected as chair person for the PRG. Sheelagh Wickham acted as rapporteur. The PRG stayed together and met as a unit with all relevant people. The only deviation from this was the visit on Friday, 30 March (13.30 – 15.00) to the OVPLI locations which are spread over a number of areas on campus. Professor Niemi and Ms. Farrell visited the locations while the rest of the PRG worked on the first draft of the report and the final presentation. They welcomed the opportunity to speak with other staff during their walk.

For further consideration the PRG divided some elements of the report between them following the initial draft. However as the PRG stayed together during the review visit and full report was circulated and commented upon by all PRG members, it is a consolidated and agreed document.

The broad areas of responsibility agreed by the PRG members were:

- Dr. Caroline Hussey.....Registry and Academic Affairs
- Professor Hannele Niemi .....Learning Innovation Unit
- Ms. Sheelagh Wickham.....Learning Innovation Unit
- Ms. Bernadette Farrell.....Student Affairs
- Prof. John Costello.....INTRA

##### **Schedule of Activity**

The Peer Review Group (PRG) first met with the Review team on Wednesday afternoon. An overall presentation was not given. After a brief introduction by VPLI/Registrar, the head of each unit spoke for a few minutes on their unit and its

function, again emphasising the somewhat eclectic makeup and diverse nature of the OVPLI.

### **Information for the review was sourced from the**

- Self Assessment Report and Appendices.
- Learning Innovation Strategy
- Meeting with Staff, students, and employers.

Other documents requested;

- Outline of University Committee Structures
- Academic Council, Terms of Reference and Standing Orders
- Academic Council Membership
- Academic Strategy Committee, Terms of reference and Standing Orders and Membership
- Academic Standards Committee, Terms of Reference, Standing Orders and Membership.
- Validation and Accreditation of programmes, regulations and guidelines
- Terms of reference of Disciplinary Committee

The OVPLI Self Assessment Report was comprehensive. It was divided into five parts with a short overview at the beginning of the document. The main sections included;

- Learning Innovations Unit
- Academic Affairs
- Registry
- Student Affairs
- INTRA (INtegrated TRAning)

Registry, Student Affairs and INTRA had undergone reviews previously and consequently a “light touch” review was decided upon for the OVPLI report. Considering it had been 4, 3 and 5 years, respectively since these reviews were carried out the PRG felt that such a “light touch” was perhaps too little and, while a summary of the findings and resultant quality implementation actions from the earlier reviews of these departments was included in the SAR there was no up-to-date detailed and/or quantitative feedback on the benefits, impact or quality of improvements resulting from these actions. As mentioned earlier each Unit took an individual approach to this review. The PRG felt that an excellent opportunity was missed and this could be considered a deficit.

Some issues arose in meetings which did not appear in the SAR, e.g. concerning the future strategy on information systems and technology in Registry,

Additional information was requested by the PRG in relation to staffing, committees etc. Access to these items was made available promptly when requested.

The appendices were extensive and included sufficient detail.

## **Background and Context**

The PRG recognised from the beginning of its deliberations the challenging and ambitious goal the OVPLI has set itself in its strategy. The *Learning Innovation Strategy* is an impressive and ambitious approach to teaching, learning and assessment in the university, and its implementation will be resource intensive, not least in its demand on the time and energies of VPLI/Registrar and her staff.

Overall the OVPLI appears a complex and diverse grouping, “loose federation” and “management construct” were two terms used to describe it. As already mentioned the SAR had five clear sections. This sectioning was reflected in the PRG experience of the review where it appeared that 5 distinct units were being reviewed. While each section clearly has its own function and purpose, each seemed to have its own delineated and limited identity with the overall OVPLI structure.

Interestingly, knowledge of the structure and make up of the OVPLI among other senior academics and administrative staff appeared to be lacking somewhat. During the meeting with a group of academic staff a simple exercise was carried out to see how many of those attending knew the make up of the OVPLI. Of the 15 people attending, 4 knew the correct, or almost correct, sections in the OVPLI, 11 did not. A similar exercise was repeated at the Administration meeting. Here the results were slightly more informed, with 5 naming all the sections (though one of these answers also included the International Office which has been subsumed into Student Affairs) and 8 who could not accurately list the sections of the OVPLI. Considering that people attending the meetings all interacted regularly with the OVPLI and had been notified and invited to attend, the lack of such basic knowledge is surprising and suggests the OVPLI identity is limited in the University.

Although the functions of the sections comprising the OVPLI are diverse, ranging from pastoral care to organising graduation, they do have the common theme of enriching the student experience, and none is incompatible with the role of the VPLI/Registrar (and each could be found within the Registrar’s remit in some other Irish universities). However, the diversity of function imposes a requirement for a thoughtful management strategy in order to promote greater cohesion between functions. The complexity and diverse nature of the OVPLI was an issue to which the PRG gave considerable thought and ways of addressing this and the knowledge deficit amongst the OVPLI users will be considered in the Recommendations.

## **Organisation and Management/ Staffing, Accommodation and Resources**

There is a large number of staff working within the overall OVPLI and, as with any large staff group there is constant turnover through promotion etc. However, some Units have a disproportional number of temporary staff while others appear to have a significant number on contract. Registry is an example of this; when investigated it appears that the permanent holders for these Registry posts have been seconded elsewhere within the University. There was also concern about the temporary nature of the LIU staff but this appears to have been addressed with confirmation of permanent appointments for this Unit which the PRG learnt of during the Quality Review. While some movement is to be expected, and indeed is good for any unit,

the high proportion of staff not in permanent appointments in the OVPLI gives rise to concern and needs to be addressed.

The OVPLI is situated in a number of locations, some have recently relocated and some are still in the process of moving. Accommodation and reporting arrangements for some units did give rise to concern, e.g. INTRA, this is a unique unit with a clear identity. While situating INTRA in Student Affairs may make it more accessible to students, The PRG had some concerns around moving the INTRA office and function out of the business environment of the INVENT centre where it had a purpose built suite of offices and interview rooms. It was felt that the OVPLI/Student Affairs area would have a quite different ethos, perhaps more pastoral than “business” orientation which may not be to benefit the this unit and indeed may detract from it.

## **5. Overall Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns**

### **OVPLI**

#### **Strengths**

- The committed leadership of the VPLI/Registrar, particularly in relation to implementing the *Learning Innovation Strategy*
- The large number of very capable and professional staff working within the overall OVPLI

#### **Opportunities**

- The adoption by the university of the *Learning Innovation Strategy* will provide a wide range of opportunities for review and innovation throughout the university and within the OVPLI itself

#### **Weaknesses**

- The units within the OVPLI are a complex and diverse grouping
- Units demonstrate a limited identity with the overall OVPLI structure
- Lack of knowledge on the part of other academic and administrative staff about the functions and make up of the OVPLI

#### **Challenges**

- The scattered location of the constituent units within OVPLI – impending moves will partially alleviate this problem
- Broad nature of its strategy which could be difficult to implement effectively without significant resourcing
- The current vacancy in the Theme Leader post in Education and Learning

## **Learning Innovation Unit**

An important section, and doing a very good and professional job with limited resources. However, further clarity is needed on structure and mission. The LIU needs to continue to act as facilitator within the University, supporting best practice in teaching and learning and engaging with all staff, students, academics, lecturers etc. Their function should not be to carry out research and scholarship but to support and facilitate such research and ensure dissemination of good practice. There is a clear need to be very broadly encompassing, and to achieve wide impact across DCU's academic staff and not to just find themselves "preaching to the converted". Links between Associate Deans (T&L) and LIU can be further developed to aid in the dissemination actions within the faculties and between the LIU and faculties by acting as embedded agents or champions of T&LI at faculty level.

To be a truly influential and internationally benchmarked Unit, it needs academic leadership, perhaps through secondment of a senior academic, active in this space. To enhance the LIU's influence, the University might review the promotional criteria for academic staff, placing greater emphasis on evidence of teaching excellence, in order to encourage academic staff to reflect on their teaching.

LIU is working in the context in which the University has an ambitious aim to strengthen its profile as a research intensive university. LIU has played an active role in the development of The DCU Learning Innovation Strategic Plan

The aims of this plan are very ambitious and indicate the direction necessary to the University's future in maintaining and developing a leading third level educational institution. LIU has a significant mission to create a culture in which quality of teaching and learning is considered important and appreciated alongside with research. This process needs strategic leadership and resource allocations. However, there seems to a gap between these ambitious aims and LIU current resources.

### **Strengths,**

- Current dedicated committed staff.
- Staff undertaking further education to support their work
- Positive attitude and function highly valued by academic and admin staff.
- Seed funding to promote educational and learning innovation
- Understanding of needs of academic staff
- LI Strategy
- Moodle

### **Opportunities**

- Strategy Document
- Utilise and build on the good will of University staff and build on their current reputation.
- Could perhaps support generic writing skills for students.

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of clear identity

- Lack of self esteem
- Temporary nature of Unit and staff
- LIU mission too broad, partly lacking definition
- Very broad strategy and plenty of enthusiasm, but need to “make haste slowly”

### **Challenges**

- Strategy Document will be a challenge if not resourced properly
- Moodle, it is only a tool and pedagogy knowledge needed to support its use is important
- Moodle and the need to ensure integration and “buy in” by all staff
- Need stability of core funding.
- Need an identified space, to run courses, e.g. Moodle training etc.

### **Academic Affairs**

This is a very small unit, but its function within the University is absolutely critical and concomitantly essential. Although there are obviously good operational and social contacts between staff in the unit and their colleagues elsewhere in the OVPLI, Academic Affairs appears almost isolated, with limited formal interaction with other units of the OVPLI, especially Registry. The staff appears excellent and are well regarded by all they come in contact with both internally and within the linked colleges. The isolation and lack of succession planning and formal links, particularly with Registry, is of major concern to the PRG and needs to be addressed urgently.

### **Strengths**

- The competence and commitment of staff, and their high reputation for professional and efficient discharge of a wide ranges of important duties and functions which is greatly valued by all stake holders
- Standard Operating Procedures – detailed and current
- Efficient, albeit small unit, which appears to have a high output
- Staff awareness of the need to marry adherence to regulation with a degree of flexibility

### **Opportunities**

- Developing better channels of communication with other units in the OVPLI
- Standard Operating Procedures, continue maintaining high standard

### **Weaknesses**

- Critical knowledge and experience confined to two specific individuals and no obvious succession planning
- Limited archive facilities
- Limited formal lines of communication with the Registry and other sections of the OVPLI

### **Challenges**

- Succession planning
- Limited formal interaction with other units in OVPLI/Registrar
- Developing and improving archive facilities



## **Registry**

Registry is a large section with 26 staff. It has recently undergone changes which resulted in the reduction from seven sub-sections to two. Two senior staff appointed to lead each of these sections.

### **Strengths**

- The actions taken post 2003 review, e.g. simplified structure with 2 sections compared to 7 formerly
- Quality of the management team and staff
- Recent advances in the application of E technology, e.g. on line registration

### **Opportunities**

- Expanding opening hours
- Further IT/on-line developments
- Development of a new E strategy and implementation plan
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### **Weaknesses**

- Staffing insecurity and instability, e.g. significant proportion of permanent post holders working outside registry who are replaced by temporary contract staff.
- No evidence of an E strategy
- Lack of appropriate IT support, e.g. Registry staff trained in advanced information/ management systems
- On-going loss of key skills and competencies at all levels
- Opening hours are not user friendly, particularly for part-time students
- Limited archive facilities

### **Challenges**

- Increased application of information technology developments on an ongoing basis to support the registry function
- Developing in-house IT and Information Systems expertise among registry staff
- “Invisibility”, i.e. lack of positive feedback for the good work they do.

## **Student Affairs**

The is a complex unit within a complex unit. There are nine sections within Student Affairs, if INTRA is included, these are;

- Careers Service
- Chaplaincy Service
- Counselling Service
- Health
- Service Sport & Recreation Service

- Student Activities
- Student Financial Assistance
- International Office Student &
- INTRA

Student Affairs underwent a full quality review in February 2004. It subsequently underwent a change of management with the retirement of the then Director in January 2006 and the appointment of the current Director in July 2006. For this reason it was decided that a “light touch” review would be sufficient. The PRG felt that considering it had been 3 years and there had been considerable changes in Student Affairs since then, a full review would have been more beneficial, particularly as the International Office had recently been subsumed and the INTRA office was shortly to become a part of Student Affairs. There was a sense that that Student Affairs had been in a state of flux due to the major changes in staff and structure over the past two years and that there has been very limited innovative activity during that period but are at a total new beginning now. As this is the case, a full review would have been beneficial.

The PRG were impressed with the enthusiasm of the representatives of the Student Affairs that we met during the review.

The Student Affairs Department can continually improve the quality of its remit and fulfil its potential by looking at some key areas.

The student experience is a brief affair, with most undergraduates only on campus for four years leading to a dynamic student profile. Attaining current and relevant information on the student cohort is part of providing relevant student services. It was noted during our visit that four projects on different subgroups of the student cohort had already begun. It is important that this type of research and feedback into the needs of the students, is a continuous process, that a variety of feedback mechanisms are used including the Students’ Union, that the results are reflected upon and changes implemented so that these changes will affect the students surveyed.

The PRG were informed of plans for a ‘one stop shop’. This is a good idea but the Student Affairs Department might consider the issue of confidentiality and the sensitivity of some student issues and therefore investigate the privacy arrangements of the ‘one stop shop’ area. It may also consider the use of appropriately trained staff with the necessary customer service skills to maintain the ‘one stop shop’. In order to facilitate the whole of the student body, particularly the part-time student cohort the extension of opening hours needs to be investigated and a plan for addressing the diverse needs of students outside of the 9am to 5pm timeframe implemented.

Many organisations struggle with continuing effective communication and the Student Affairs Department recognises the need for improvement in this area, to both students and staff within DCU. A worrying outcome presently of this issue is the fact that the Student Assistance Fund allocation was not exhausted last year, particularly as most

other Universities in Ireland are stretched to find more money, this might suggest a lack of awareness among the student body, and it could however be due to local restrictions within the University. A strategic plan for the communication of the services provided by the Student Affairs Department is necessary. One area to be addressed under this plan is branding the department as a cohesive unit and using this opportunity to communicate what the Student Affairs Department is and does within DCU to all of the college community.

The role of the Student Affairs Department in the University's orientation programs is being examined, looking at what is best for students and the most effective way to communicate the work of the Student Affairs Department. A suggestion is that this could be addressed under a communication plan.

During our visit there was a suggestion that there may be a lack of resources in some sections of the Student Affairs Department, however because of the lack of a recent review and insufficient information in relation to resourcing it is difficult for the PRG to make recommendations in relation to this area. Adequate resources are without doubt necessary for the continuation and improvement of the good work achieved by the Student Affairs Department to date. There seems to be an inconsistency as to the role of the health services on campus. According to publication: Health Promoting Universities; concept, experience and framework for action, WHO, 1998, "A health promoting university is not one that has achieved a certain level of health, it is one that is conscious of health and striving to improve it" That WHO Report also recommended the following, recognising the potential for institutions of higher education to promote the health of populations through:

- Protecting the health and well being of students, staff and the wider community through their policies and practices;
- Increasingly relating health promotion to teaching and research; and
- By developing health promotion alliances and outreach into the community.

The same report pointed out that Ireland had one of the highest participation rates in third-level education, making health promotion and protection in college communities' all-the-more crucial. This particular report is the document upon which the Health Promoting College Network was founded, which is supported by both the HEA and the DoES.

### **Strengths**

- Excellent Staff
- New Senior Appointment and the obvious energy, enthusiasm and vision she brings to this post
- Diversity of skills and competencies within the Unit
- Interfaith centre and its capacity to accommodate and cater for the diverse pastoral care of all students

### **Opportunities**

- To harness the diversity of skills and competencies within the Unit to enrich student services

- The relocation of the unit provides opportunities to develop more cohesive services and provide a ‘one stop shop’ to handle student queries
- More extensive opening hours would bring the unit into contact with a wider population of students, e.g. part-time students

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of clear, inclusive branding for student services
- Communicating the services available to staff and students
- Current distributed locations inhibits inter-service communication, but impending relocation should rectify this
- Counsellors (perceived shortage)
- Opening hours make it difficult for some students to access services

### **Challenges**

- Increased demand for services when SA moves to more accessible location
- More extensive opening hours would call for key services to be available outside the nine-to-five framework
- Achieving effective branding for SA and its range of services
- Matching services available to changing student needs
- More feedback is required to identify student needs

### **INTRA Office**

INTRA (INtegrated TRaining) is a scheme whereby undergraduate students are placed in paid employment, relevant to their discipline, during semester 2 and/or during the summer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of their studies. Students submit CVs and compete for jobs as they would do if they were graduates seeking relevant employment. It has been a unique selling point for DCU amongst the Dublin universities for many years. In addition, is also a very important element in the education and formation of undergraduate students, especially in the context of the suite of business and industry relevant denominated degrees that DCU offers. It provides students with real world experience of the workplace environment as well as opportunities to improve their time and project management skills, communication and writing skills as well as their technical skills. Accordingly, INTRA is a key element of the student learning experience and is appropriately a module carrying a substantial credit rating in all associated degree programmes.

INTRA was, until very recently, a function embedded within the Office for Innovation & Business Relations (IBR). With the impending retirement of the former Director of IBR, a decision was taken by the Governing Authority of the University to wind down IBR and, from 1 October 2006, to transfer the INTRA function to the OVPLI as a discrete unit. It would have its own devolved budget and a head of function reporting (from Spring 2007) to the Director of Student Affairs.

The INTRA Unit also underwent a “light touch” review despite the fact it is five years since its last review. Unlike some other “light touch” reports the INTRA Office report did not give explicit information on progress on the recommendations of the

PRG that undertook the quality review of the then IBR (Innovation and Business Relations). This would have been a useful aid to this PRG. That said, the INTRA SAR did provide useful insights into the organisation and function of the office as well as its ethos.

Concern was expressed by the members of the PRG about the movement of INTRA to Student Affairs as, while recognising the obvious benefits, such as involvement with the careers service etc., it was felt the business connections could be muted somewhat by the move to such a student welfare focused rather than a business focused location.

The PRG also has concerns around the current volatility in staffing. The INTRA Office should have 8 staff in place. Right now, one coordinator position (Computing, Physics, Maths and Fiontar) is vacant, as is the Admin Assistant position. These should be filled without delay as they are key positions in the team. The contract for the Business/HSS coordinator expires in April 2007. The PRG considers the proposal to make the B/HSS and CPMF coordinator positions permanent very positively, given the unique selling point that INTRA brings to DCU.

The PRG met three of the senior staff of the INTRA office, the Programme Manager and the Coordinator for the Business School/Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and a Coordinator for the Sciences. The meeting was convivial with useful clarifications of the INTRA functions and the potential impact of the new environment and location to which it is moving. In the course of the discussion a number of issues were raised.

It was clear that staff were keen that the INTRA budget currently being transferred from INVENT (IBR) should remain intact and ring-fenced to ensure the continued effective functioning of the office.

INTRA staff do not view themselves as a student welfare unit; rather they execute a well defined recruitment function. Hence, the ethos is quite different from all the other component parts of the Student Affairs (SA) group. This may need to be addressed and made explicitly clear to students as the new association with, and physical proximity to, SA may leave students with the impression that INTRA has a pastoral, rather than a business-like, approach to student clients.

The significant concern expressed in the SAR about staffing volatility was echoed during this meeting.

The INTRA office has a useful online system for managing the INTRA process and an enhanced system under discussion at present.

A number of other points of note arose during the discussion such as the occasional feedback to programme chairs of information on key skills deficits that employers have identified in particular student groups, the recognition that the current 'one size fits all' INTRA report template may need to be adapted to different programmes due to the nature of the different experiences, e.g., some students may do internal research

placements in one of the campus research centres rather than a traditional industrial placement.

The group also met some INTRA employers. They were universally supportive of the INTRA programme. During the discussion it became clear that in certain disciplines employers had to compete with each other to attract good candidates. The employers were keen and willing to come to DCU and make their INTRA recruitment pitches before year 3, e.g., to students in semester 2 of year 2. It was gratifying for the PRG to hear that employers were conscious that they should offer relevant, meaningful and useful placements to students.

### **Strengths**

- Competencies and experience of staff
- High regard in which the programme is held by employers
- Benefit to students in personal development and job experience.

### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity to establish a useful feedback channel to programme chairs and INTRA liaison officers about any deficits in relation to skills
- Increase benefit to students in experience, personal development and job opportunities
- Possible extension of the INTRA model to postgraduate students in the context of new Graduate Education Programmes which will roll out over the next 7 years.

### **Weaknesses**

- Staff Instability
- Move from purpose built location

### **Challenges**

- Recent loss of staff with relevant experience and knowledge
- Concomitant loss of industry networks, key personal contacts, etc.
- Lack of obvious succession planning
- Adapting to new location

## **6. Recommendations for Improvement**

Each recommendation is preceded by an indication of priority as follows: an indication of the level(s) of the University where action is required. The key is as follows;

### **Priority:**

- P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.
- P2: A recommendation that is important, but can (or perhaps must) be addressed on a more extended time scale.
- P 3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the Unit.

**Level of Action:**

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

We were asked by the VPLI/Registrar for advice on the replacement for the Head of Registry. Having given a lot of thought to a management structure which would promote greater cohesion between operational units and relieve some management pressure from the VPLI/Registrar during the implementation of the Learning Innovation Strategy,

**P1 (U) We recommend the secondment of a senior academic to a new position as Deputy Registrar (or other appropriate senior title).**

We recommend that the Deputy Registrar should report to the VPLI/Registrar, have a term of office co-terminous with the VPLI/Registrar and that the responsibilities of the position should include:

- Academic Affairs.
  - Registry
  - INTRA Office.
- The Deputy Registrar would chair a management group comprising the Heads of these units which would meet regularly.
  - If a post of Deputy Registrar is created, it may not be necessary to replace the Head of Registry, and both senior managers in the Registry could report directly to the Deputy Registrar and participate in the management group.

**P1 (U/A) Recommend the development (with support from the University) of an E strategy in Registry and appoint permanent staff to Registry who are familiar with the registry functions but have an IT background**

**P1 (A) Recommend the development of formal links between the units in the OVPLI, perhaps through a formal management committee.** This would help to ensure there was no overlap of actions and that all strategy is familiar to all members of the OVPLI.

**P2 (A) Recommend improvement of communication within OVPLI and the rest of the University to ensure that staff and students are aware of the functions of the VPLI and Registrar.**

**P2 (A/U) Recommend the improvement of archiving facilities (electronic and physical), particularly for Registry and Academic Affairs.** A long term strategic planning of archiving is needed, particularly for Registry and Academic Affairs. It should contain plans to improve archiving facilities (electronic and physical) and

review procedures to ensure the necessary staff can access physical materials and electronic data easily and safely.

**P1 (A) Recommend that the VPLI, and the Deputy Registrar if appointed, give immediate attention to succession planning in all units, but particularly in Academic Affairs**

**P1 (U/A) A priority for the Deputy Registrar (or Head of Registry) should be a review of IT systems in use in the Registry,** their interfaces with other systems in use in the university and the level of IT skills of staff in Registry. Appointment of a Systems Administrator (for the three units reporting to the Deputy Registrar) should be considered whose responsibilities would include ensuring adequate IT training for new staff and regular upskilling for existing staff, particularly when any changes are introduced to the system.

**P2 (U) Recommend that the Director of HR, in consultation with her senior management colleagues, should review the impact of current HR policies on units,** such as the Registry, with a large complement of early career staff. Current policies, whereby staff in permanent posts who move to other units within the university are replaced by temporary contract posts can have a very negative impact on the unit to which the permanent post belonged.

**P1 (U) Recommend that to be a truly influential and internationally benchmarked Unit, the LIU needs academic leadership, perhaps through secondment of a senior academic, active in this space.**

**P2 (U) Recommend promoting and intensifying research of higher education pedagogy** In a research intensive university, teaching must also be research-based. This means that teaching and learning are linked together with the newest research, dealing with contents and methods of teaching, and teaching is also an object of research. LIU needs a senior researcher who can activate, facilitate and coordinate research of university teaching and learning at the whole university level and who has a recognized status in national and international collaboration. The current staff members are still at a doctoral candidate level and they have future potential.

**P2 (U) Recommend the appointment of a leading senior researcher of higher education pedagogy to the Learning Innovation Unit to promote and intensify research**

The unit would have more power and influence if it could recruit a leading senior researcher who has a high level competence of research on teaching and learning in higher education and who has leadership capacity in order;

- to support and facilitate teachers and experts in different faculties to develop their own teaching through systematic research. The University has an important resource in faculties and different disciplines and this provides a basis to create a research community of teaching and learning in HE. European universities such as DCU are facing important questions: How to teach different academic disciplines (e.g. chemistry, business, agriculture, social sciences) to different learners and with what is high quality learning in different academic fields, also in multidisciplinary



groups. This kind of research is also an important part of quality assurance processes;

- to activate DCU researchers to collaborate within DCU and with international partners and projects of teaching and learning in higher education;
- to facilitate and empower DCU teachers to start action research projects in their own academic disciplines and help teachers to create networks also crossing over discipline borders. These activities can also be parts of staff training. These projects and training can also be carried out cooperatively with School of Education;
- to support LIU staff to further network with teachers and researchers in achieving the strategic aims mentioned in the DCU Learning Innovation Strategic.

**P1 (A) Learning Innovation Unit need to strengthen earlier and seek new ways to create systematic and continuous cooperation with other OVPLI units and DCU faculties** The LIU should have the plan on how to create systematic and continuous cooperation with other OVPLI units and faculties e.g. in the following tasks:

- to promote student learning in different phases of their university studies
- to help teachers to learn new teaching methods and to use different tools and technology (e.g. Moodle) pedagogically
- to facilitate the creation of contacts and cooperation with stakeholders in a local community (e.g. practice in working life)

LIU cannot do these tasks by itself but its mission could be to activate, mediate and help to organise networks between different actors. The recent seed money is an important resource as well as the courses LIU has organised. The network with Associate Deans is an excellent recent example. In addition to these, there could be cooperative groups of networks of actors and experts at a more grass root level (e.g. networks of educational technology, quality of student learning outcomes, new study programs etc). It would be a great advantage if the faculties could name a key person in their own contexts and LIU would support those experts to share their experiences and best practices. The function of these experts is important in the own local contexts in supporting other staff members and providing new impulses to advance quality of learning and teaching. Conditions for this networking model are that the faculties name these key persons and provide them with some warrant and resources (e.g. time) to play this supportive role.

**P1 (A) Student Affairs** needs more feedback from students; a variety of mechanisms, including consultation with the Students' Union, should be used. The results should be reflected upon and changes implemented, so that these changes will affect all students.

**P1 (A)** Student Affairs opening hours needs to be investigated and a plan for addressing the diverse needs of students outside of the 9am to 5pm time frame implemented.

**P1 (A/U)** A strategic plan for the communication of the services provided by the Student Affairs Department is necessary. One area to be addressed under this plan is branding the department as a cohesive unit and using this opportunity to communicate what the Student Affairs Department is and does within DCU to all of the University community.

**P2 (A/U)** The role of the Student Affairs Department in the University's orientation programs be reviewed.

#### **P1 (U) Recommendations in relation to INTRA Staffing**

- The vacant Computing, Physics, Maths and Fiontar coordinator position should be filled without delay. The PRG concur with the INTRA office proposal that it be a permanent position in order to attract a candidate of high calibre with strong relevant industry experience and networks available to him/her.
- The uncertainty around the Business/HSS coordinator position should be eliminated. The PRG concurs with the proposal to make this position permanent.

#### **P1 (U) Recommendations in relation to INTRA Budget**

- Given the key advantage that INTRA affords DCU in attracting students to DCU, the budget should remain ring-fenced to ensure that the office functions efficiently and effectively.

#### **P1 (U) Recommendations in relation to INTRA Structure and Management**

- The PRG believes that the plan to integrate INTRA into Student Affairs is inappropriate, given the business oriented ethos of INTRA and the contrasting pastoral mission of SA. As recommended above, we propose that INTRA should be an independent unit with a ring-fenced budget. Its Director would report to the Deputy Registrar and participate in a management group with the Heads of Academic Affairs and the Registry.

#### **P2 (A) Recommendations in relation to INTRA Function**

- The INTRA office should establish a reliable and effective feedback mechanism to channel employer feedback to relevant programme chairs and directors to help them address skills deficits and update curricula
- The proposal that employers be afforded an opportunity to make presentations to undergraduates in semester 2 of year 2 on INTRA positions and opportunities likely to be available to them the following year should receive serious consideration. It may also be useful to ask students, without prejudice,

for indications of their preferences. This could help planning for the following year's INTRA cycle.

- The INTRA office should give serious consideration to designing (in consultation with relevant School INTRA Coordinators) a menu of INTRA report templates appropriate to the placement type.

### **Comments on the Quality Review Process**

The Director of the QPU invited the PRG to comment on the review process, particularly the Peer Review procedures. In general, we were very impressed by the process, both in its formal documentation and in its actual implementation by Dr Lechleiter. In our view the process adopts all aspects of best practice as developed by the IUA and the IUQB. The inclusion of internal members in the PRG has been a controversial subject as the process developed, and the external members of the PRG would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation of the essential contribution of the internal members of the PRG to our deliberations. Without their wisdom and experience, we felt that we would have wasted a lot of time in coming to grips with internal structures and conventions and would have missed many significant nuances in the information presented to us. In particular, the work of the Rapporteur is invaluable. We recommend that DCU continue to include internal reviewers on PRGs.

The PRG, particularly the external members, were also very impressed that the President and other members of the senior management group, gave of that scarce and non-renewable resource, their time, to meet the PRG, to hear our views and provide any additional information we required. We believe that this meeting bestows a flattering significance on the work of the PRG and, more importantly, recognises the painstaking work of staff in the unit under review and in the QPU.

In this particular review, because of the complexity of the OVPLI, the PRG had a very tight schedule which, because of detailed organisation, functioned extremely well, and we would like to thank everybody we met, from the OVPLI and elsewhere in the university, for their candour and brevity.