

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement
Programme for Support/Service Offices
2010-2016



Quality Improvement Plan

Secretary's Office

March 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Secretary's Office Peer Group Review took place between 28th and 30th September 2011 and the response to the subsequent report is set out hereunder.

The Secretary's Office would like to thank the Peer Review Group, the Quality Promotion Office, the DCU Staff and the externals who participated in the Peer Review Process.

2. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

The Secretary's Office and the various units reporting to it agree with the recommendations of the Peer Review Report and are committed to acting on the findings. The Peer Review Group summarised the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and concerns and the Secretary's Office, and Units accept that this is a good snap shot of the current position. In particular the recommendation for leveraging greater synergies between the units is acknowledged it is also accepted that there are a number of communications issues, and in particular, the use of the web which when addressed will improve performance. The vast majority of the recommendations can be implemented within one year. The exceptions are recommendations 14 and 35 which would require significant capital expenditure. As no funding will be available from the State, private sources would have to be identified. If sufficient money was identified the procurement and planning process and the construction time required would require more than 12 months.

The initial work on the recommendations around storage of records and disaster recovery plans could be completed within a year but it will take longer to put comprehensive policies in place.

As stated recommendations 14 and 35 require capital expenditure, the recommendations around storage and business recovery would probably require a temporary contract resource. Ultimately, the IT and space requirement fully to meet these recommendations will cost some millions of Euros. Recommendation 3 envisages a permanent extra FTE and in the current climate this is difficult to see that this can be achieved.

Many of the recommendations involve some overlap across a number of reporting areas, and several can only be addressed following the planned configuration of the Secretary's Office role and responsibilities. Until the appointment of a new head to the office, the Senior Management Group, in so far as this is practically possible, will assume responsibility for addressing those recommendations falling directly under the Secretary's remit.

2 Recommendations for Improvements in SECRETARY'S OFFICE

The following notation is used in the recommendations for improvement.

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.

P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the Office.

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

S: Secretary's Office

A: Reporting Units – Estates, ISS, CTYI, Sports Academy, GAA Academy, Access & Student Recruitment, Health & Safety, Freedom of Information.

U: University Executive/Senior Management

Or other areas, for example Finance, OVPRI as applicable.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
1	S, U	1	All governance aspects of Governing Authority and wholly owned companies should be taken on by the Secretary's Office.	All tasks relating to the governance aspects of Governing Authority are undertaken by the Secretary's Office. The wholly owned companies are separate legal entities with boards of directors, have a holding company with its own board (DCU Commercial) and a CEO. If the holding company and the University determine that this recommendation should be accepted, the Secretary's Office would be willing to take on the work. University management are in agreement with this recommendation.
2	U	1	The Secretary's Office should provide the corporate secretarial support for functioning subsidiaries and the Secretary or his nominee should act as company secretary.	This is a reasonable suggestion. Currently the corporate secretarial support for companies is undertaken by Arthur Cox and the cost incurred could be used within the University instead. However, neither the current Secretary nor any of the staff in the office are qualified Company Secretaries and this deficiency would have to be corrected. From University management perspective, our legal advisors, Arthur Cox, provide company secretarial services primarily in relation to the interaction with the Companies Registration Office, filing returns etc. This does not prevent other company secretarial support taking place such as attending board meetings and acting as secretary to those board meetings. University management are in agreement with this recommendation and will address this issue, and the necessary skills set, in a forth-coming planned reconfiguration of the role and function of the Secretary's Office. Many of the following recommendations in the PRG report will, of necessity, be addressed within the context of this reconfiguration. Where possible, however, recommendations that are 'stand-alone', or refer to a specific office or area, will be addressed as soon as practicable.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
3	U	1	Consideration should be given to appointing a deputy to the Secretary within the Secretary's Office to carry some of the ever increasing burden and to deal with compliance and to act as recording Secretary to the Governing Authority. This would assist also with the issue of spreading institutional knowledge, succession planning and governance expertise within the University.	<p>This issue is one for the University to address. The view in the Secretary's Office would be that in the current employment climate it would be very difficult to increase staff complement.</p> <p>The University's response is as recommendation 2 above i.e. planned reconfiguration of Secretary's Office.</p>
4	U	1	The PRG recommends the establishment of an IT projects committee, whose membership includes some members of the University's Senior Management, to be tasked with prioritizing, resourcing and clarifying ownership of IT projects	<p>Again this an issue which is addressed to the University but the view of the Secretary's Office would be that if such a projects committee is established great care would have to be taken with its composition to ensure that it could operate effectively and correctly.</p> <p>University management has commenced discussions with the Director of Information Support Services (ISS) on this issue with a view to making a recommendation to Executive on the most appropriate way forward in addressing this recommendation. The current reporting line between the Director of ISS and the Secretary is likely to continue in the future. Therefore the SMG representative on any such group is likely to be the University Secretary; who would be the likely Chair of any such group.</p>
5	S	1	Greater emphasis is needed on informing the University of the work carried out by the Secretary's Office and of its "rationale, purpose and strategic objectives".	This is one of a number of recommendations which touches on the issue of communications and it is accepted by the Secretary's Office that there is room for a fresh approach to informing the University community as to the purpose of the office.
6	S	1	A major revamp of the Secretary's Office website is required covering all areas reporting in and functions and services under the Secretary's direction.	It is accepted that insufficient attention has been paid to the website which is a key communications medium, and it will be re-designed and an individual in the office will be given responsibility for populating it, and regularly updating it.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
7	A	1	Greater horizontal communication between all of the Heads of Units would aid interaction and generate synergies between services.	It is accepted that better communication across the Units could be achieved, and this will be addressed by initiating monthly meetings of the various Heads for which each will be asked to suggest agenda items. The group will be encouraged to have a greater number of bi-lateral meetings as appropriate.
8	S, U	1	The University should develop a Records Management Policy which should include Retention and Disposal Schedules for records which if properly implemented could free up space within the Secretary's Office.	<p>There already are records management protocols in different areas of the University. Some records must, under law, be held for a clearly defined period of time. However it is accepted that multiple copies of particular documents are being stored. Initial discussion has taken place on moving to a situation where new records, where possible, would all be digital and historical records would be reviewed and that we would dispose of surplus or redundant material. This is a University wide issue and the University should probably establish a cross-department committee to examine this issue and develop a policy and protocols for decision by Executive.</p> <p>University management are supportive of the recommendation to develop an overarching Records Management policy and will support the Secretary in taking the lead on this project.</p>
9	S, U	1	In the context of Estates Office, it should instigate a document management review with a view to identifying significant documents that must be archived and those that are surplus to requirements	<p>It is accepted that this would be a worthwhile exercise but there simply is not the capacity in the Estates office to undertake the task currently. A temporary appointment for this specific exercise would be required.</p> <p>A number of central units such as the Registry and ISS have developed proposals for specific initiatives or projects that have required special project funding and /or additional staffing on short-term, fixed contracts. University management would encourage the Director of Estates to develop such a proposal and submit to the Budget Committee and Executive in the normal way.</p>

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
10	U, S	1	An investigation of off-site and digital archiving of key documents in the Estates should be undertaken.	<p>The possibility of off-site storage has recently been examined by the Estates Office and is prohibitively expensive. The exercise referred to as No. 8 should seek to achieve a solution which can be accommodated without recourse to external rental space and should form part of the work of the committee proposed at Number 8.</p> <p>University management will continue to work with the Secretary's Office and the Estates Office to find an appropriate solution to the identified archiving and storage issues.</p>
11	U, S	1	Put in place a cohesive project to develop comprehensive business continuity and emergency plans for the University.	<p>The key areas, Estates and ISS will work together to identify what is required to support comprehensive business continuity and emergency plans for the University. Based on the output from this initial exercise draft plans will be developed for approval by Senior Management.</p> <p>Specific procedures critical to the management of any emergency have been put in place over the past number of years. University management will work with the Secretary and the key stakeholders to develop a more comprehensive approach to business continuity and emergency planning for the University. The drafting of a business continuity plan is scheduled to be commenced following the completion of the IT risk assessment process referred to in 12 below. The process will be overseen by the Secretary with input from stakeholders across the University.</p>

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
12	U, A	1	A risk register for IT should be developed, in conjunction with a register for all other key areas of the campus.	<p>An IT Risk Register is in the final stages of completion and will be presented to Senior Management in the first quarter of 2012.</p> <p>The University Risk Manager is liaising with the Director of ISS, and all Heads of function, in populating and updating unit and corporate risk registers.</p>
13	U, A	1	We recommend that the University urgently adopt a policy in relation to the systematic encryption of sensitive or confidential information held by staff on computers and mobile devices, incorporating sanctions for non-compliance.	<p>Existing ICT policies will be reviewed and, where appropriate, revised policies will be submitted to Executive for approval. The existing encryption solution and alternative solutions will be evaluated to determine the most appropriate solution for DCU to support any new policy. A framework for the deployment of the agreed solution will then be established.</p> <p>University management will support the Director of ISS in all ways possible in this project</p>
14	U,	1	The very unsatisfactory accommodation and working conditions in the Estates Office need to be addressed either by providing new, appropriately located premises or by a significant upgrade of the existing premises.	<p>It is accepted by the Secretary's Office that the accommodation and working conditions in the Estates Office are poor. However as the University has been advised that there will be no infrastructural funding from the State for a number of years it is difficult to see how this recommendation can be carried out in the near future.</p> <p>The President has had initial discussions with the Director of Estates on this issue and has asked for some initial costed options to be presented to University management, in order to help management to begin to ameliorate this situation. Following the completion of the strategic plan University Management will commence work on a development plan for the campus as a whole. Part of the development of the DCUET fund raising campaign is to address both necessary key academic and capital developments. A longer term solution to the accommodation requirements of the Estates Office will be part of the new campus development plan.</p>

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
15	S	2	For Governing Authority meetings, the agenda should indicate whether matters are for decision, discussion, noting, information etc.	This has not been the practice for Governing Authority meetings, but the Secretary is aware from other fora where he acts as a Director that this approach can be very useful in ordering the business of the meeting and if acceptable to the Chancellor and the Authority there should be no reason not to implement it immediately.
16	S	2	Agenda, papers, minutes etc for wholly-owned subsidiary companies should be co-ordinated and delivered from the Secretary's Office in order to achieve consistent standards of practice.	As referred to in Number 2 the companies have their own structure. If the University is willing to adopt this recommendation, the Secretary's Office would be happy to undertake the work involved.
17	U, S	2	As secretary to the Audit Committee the Secretary should ensure co-ordination between the work of the Risk Manager, Strategic Planning, Internal Audit and Health & Safety given the close proximity and interaction of their respective functions.	This proposal would cut across current reporting relationships in the University and in the view of the Secretary's Office it is a matter for the University to decide whether the steps suggested are necessary. The University recognises the need for close cooperation among those units with assurance functions including those listed in the recommendation. The University has recently located Strategic Planning, Quality Promotion, Risk Management and Internal Audit on the same office floor. The effective coordination of these functions goes beyond the Company Secretary and requires the members of the Executive Committee which receives updates from each of these functions to ensure that proper coordination among all of the assurance functions. This will be considered as part of the review and restructuring of the role of the Secretary.
18	S	2	As governance duties expand, the structure of the Secretary's Office should be examined in light of the recommendations in this report.	This recommendation has much in common with Recommendation 3 and other recommendations addressed above and it would be useful for the President and the Secretary to review the structure of the office. Such an examination will form part of a review and reconfiguration of the role and function of the Secretary's Office as mentioned in response to recommendation 2 above.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
19	U, A	2	Consideration should be given to outsourcing records storage.	The outsourcing of physical records has been addressed in earlier responses. The possibilities of the Cloud and other technological solutions for digital storage need to be examined and should form part of the work of the committee proposed at Number 8. The University management response is as to recommendation 10 above.
20	U	2	A University Liaison Officer should be appointed (possibly the Secretary or deputy if appointed) to work with the CEO of subsidiary companies to ensure co-operation and collaboration (where appropriate) between the subsidiary companies and the University staff.	The reporting relationship between the University and the subsidiary companies has recently been changed. The CEO of DCU Commercial Limited who previously reported to an external chairperson, now reports to the Director of Finance. However in the medium term this issue will be addressed as part of the review and restructuring of the role of the Secretary.
21	U	2	Consideration should be given to separating the reporting lines of the Secretary, ie. As a member of the Executive to the President, and as Secretary of Governing Authority to the Governing Authority.	University management will consider this recommendation, as part of the review and reconfiguration of the role and function of the Secretary's Office.
22	U	3	Risk Management should be closely coordinated with other related areas with the University, eg. Health & Safety and Internal Audit.	University management's response is as at 17 above.
OFFICES REPORTING TO THE SECRETARY				
23	A	1	There is a need to improve the communication of strategic priorities downwards and from the functional units upwards.	In response to Number 7, regular meetings of the Unit Heads is proposed, and this should aid with the communication as recommended here.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
24	S	2	Consideration should be given to assigning the Fire Safety Officer to the Health & Safety Function.	<p>While an argument could be made to adopt this approach it is equally valid to argue that since most of the work carried out by the Fire Safety Office relates to Estates, the function should remain in Estates.</p> <p>Fire safety policy and performance issues in relation to fire safety management on campus will be reported to Executive via the existing Health and Safety Steering Group, a sub-committee of Executive. A report on Fire safety management on campus will be incorporated into the annual report of the Steering Group. A review of the positioning of the Fire Safety Officer post will be conducted in due course as recommended.</p>
25	S	1	The Health & Safety Officer should be invited to attend Estates Management Committee meetings.	This is accepted.
26	S	2	There should be recognition of the work undertaken by Admin staff in H&S Office through career development.	This recommendation will be addressed through the Performance Management Development System.
27	A	1	CTYI should demonstrate how it adds value to the University by bringing talented students to DCU and consider adding this to its mission.	CTYI will work closely with Student Recruitment to ensure that all CTYI secondary school summer students get a chance to hear more about DCU, get the opportunity to meet faculty members from various departments and consider attending DCU as a third level student.
28	U	1	The University should ensure that science and computer laboratories not in use for other activities are made available to CTYI on Saturdays and during the Summer.	<p>The Director of CTYI has met with Heads of Schools in the Faculties of Science and Health and Engineering and Computing to discuss this recommendation. These meetings have been positive and hopefully more facilities will become available in the coming Summer</p> <p>University management are supportive of the activities of the Director of CTYI outlined above, and will review the progress made in the coming years.</p>

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
29	A	1	CTYI, Access and Sports should develop synergies in areas such as funding and outreach.	CTYI is currently working with Access on a number of funding proposals including Microsoft, Matheson, Ormsby Prentice and Google. All these Units will investigate common funding opportunities.
30	A	2	CTYI should work to strengthen its brand.	CTYI has a stand at this year's Young Scientist Exhibition and had feature articles in the Irish Times in November and the Irish Independent in December. CTYI will work closely with the new Director of Communications & Marketing in DCU to promote CTYI activities.
31	A	2	CTYI should recruit an additional administrator to deal with increasing participant numbers.	CTYI recently made a successful application to Budget Committee for two senior administrative positions and a technical support officer.
32	A	2	CTYI should consider expanding its advisory board, including key influencers in the Science & Health and Engineering & Computing Faculties.	CTYI has asked Dr Noel Murphy from the School of Engineering (Faculty of Engineering & Computing), and Dr Eilish McLaughlin from the School of Physics (Faculty of Science & Health) to join the CTYI Advisory Board. The University is supportive of this expansion of the Advisory Board and as indicated above has supported the extension of the membership to representation from the two faculties listed above
33	A, U	1	The Sports Academy should launch a new webpage both for information provision (to collate all the Academy activities) and to advertise its expertise and achievements with wider dissemination of Academy success stories.	Currently there are two separate websites for GAA and Athletics Academies. These will be re-vamped and an overarching page providing information on elite sport at DCU will be added. The Board of the Sports Academy will oversee this development in Spring 2012 and seek to ensure adequate resources for it. Consultation with, and advice from, Communications and Marketing will be sought.
34	U	1	Generate more certainty as to the annual budget of the Sports Academy with more guaranteed funding streams (securing firm commitments from donors) as a means of ensuring stability of operation and facilities.	In the current public finance climate the funding of the Sports Academy will have to be secured from private sources and the Academy will work with DCUET on a fundraising programme. The University will continue to work with the Sports Academy on this issue. However in the current economic climate the University is very constrained in what it can do. Certainty in the annual budget is and will remain difficult. Control of spending will remain paramount while efforts to retain existing funding and source new income will continue.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
35	U	2	Consideration of new income streams (by the University), pledges or new sponsorship to continue to enhance the facilities (and provide Winter training facilities, if possible).	As at Number 34, funding for facilities will have to come from private sources. This will be addressed by a combination of fundraising and joint ventures. University response is at no. 34 above.
36	U, A	3	Explore additional ways to market the Elite Sports programme, using the University's Public Affairs division.	The Academy will liaise with Communications & Marketing to explore how better to market the elite sports programme. See comments in no.33
37	U	1	The University should clarify recruitment priorities for Student Recruitment.	The Head of Access and Recruitment is due to make a presentation to Senior Management on proposed strategic objectives for Access and Student Recruitment in February 2012. Recommendations from Senior Management will inform Access and Recruitment planning for 2012/13. An update will be presented to Senior Management in May 2012 and a presentation will be made to Executive and Heads & Deans in Autumn 2012. University management will continue to work with the Head of Access and Recruitment on this issue.
38	U	1	The University should clearly convey the expectation that academics engage in a substantive way with Student Recruitment.	It is important to emphasise that the Academic Community provides adequate support when attending school visits and career fairs on behalf of the Student Recruitment Office. However, additional support is required from academic colleagues when meeting with prospective students/parents and school groups visiting the campus. Student Recruitment will continue to provide an internal newsletter on student recruitment activities to University staff. Student Recruitment will revise its current webpage to highlight to University staff the support/resources available from the office. The University is entirely supportive of this recommendation and has the issue of student recruitment and staff responsibilities in this area as an ongoing item on the agendas of both the University Executive and the Deans and Heads meetings. These fora are actively used in order to keep both Heads of Academic units and the Head of Access and Recruitment apprised of relevant developments, concerns and need for strategic interventions prior to and during the recruitment period.

Recommendation Number	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report)	Office Response (University Response in red font)
39	Y	2	The Registrar and Student Recruitment should work to find a solution to the problems in recruiting students from Northern Ireland (and the UK) posed by pattern of release of A-levels results and subsequent UCAS offers vis-à-vis 1 st round offers.	<p>Staff of the Student Recruitment Office met the Registrar in October 2011 for initial discussions on activities in Northern Ireland and the campaign in that region has progressed as planned for 2011/12. When data on 2012/13 recruitment becomes available from the CAO in March 2012 the relevant University staff will meet to review the acceptance and registration process for students from Northern Ireland. In October 2012 the current year outcome will be reviewed and plans for the following year will be made.</p> <p>The Admissions Officer has been charged with identifying potential options in this area with a view to developing proposals for consideration by University management.</p>
40	A	2	Seek to explore and develop synergies between the Access Service and the Sports Academy in the areas of funding and sponsorship.	Colleagues from Access, CTYI and Sport will meet in February 2012 to explore new funding/sponsorship opportunities.
41	U, A	2	Explore where resources could be found to continue and expand the outreach liaison role of the Access Service.	As noted at Number 37, the Head of Access and Recruitment is due to make a presentation to Senior Management in February 2012 and this will include identifying the resources required to facilitate the HEAR process from February 2012.

3. Office Quality Committee (for the Self-Assessment Report)

Members consisted of Martin Conry (Chair), Ita Tobin, Colm O'Reilly, Eileen Tully, Enda Fitzpatrick, Michael Kennedy, Mike Kelly, Fina Akintola, Gaye Crowley

4. Prioritised Resource Requirements

Project 1: Records / Storage/ Digitising – 1 FTE

Cost Estimate: €70K