

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



Unit Quality Improvement Plan

**Office of the Vice-President for Research**

*14<sup>th</sup> November 2005*

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Appendix One

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Give a very brief introduction to the approach taken in the development of the Quality Improvement Plan

This Quality Implementation Plan is the culmination of a process over the preceding twelve months from the submission of the unit Self-Assessment report, site visit by the Review Panel (February 2005) and receipt of the Review Group Site Visit Report.

The Implementation Plan was developed in the following steps:

1. All staff members of the OVPR participated in an Away Day off campus to review the Site Panel Report and the key recommendations
2. Unit goals for the coming year were identified
3. A draft Implementation Plan was developed and reviewed by all members of staff.

The following members of staff were involved in the development of this Implementation Plan:

Prof. Eugene Kennedy	Vice-President for Research
Ms. Mary Adsley	Research Officer
Dr. Ana Terres	Research Officer
Ms. Fiona Brennan	Research Officer
Dr. Mark Rushforth	Research Officer
Dr. Declan Raftery	Director (Chair)

We commend the Site Panel for their engagement in the short period of time available to them with the key issues highlighted within the Self-Assessment Report. They produced a thorough and well thought-out report with a series of recommendations which will all be addressed in the following sections. The main focus of the Site Panel recommendations is on the Strategic role of the OVPR. However, the OVPR do not want to overlook the need for continual improvement of the operational aspects of the units functions.

The optimal approach, in our opinion, is for the OVPR to provide operational efficiency and innovative support for all aspects of DCU research within a clearly defined Research Strategic Framework. The OVPR will address both the recommendations of the Site Panel and also issues that were highlighted in the SAR to ensure the delivery of the highest quality professional service to the research community at DCU.

### Specific Actions Already Implemented

- New university Research Strategy approved by university Governing Authority
- VPR has been appointed to the Board of INVENT
- One of the units staff members has moved from a position of secondment to permanent appointment within the OVPR
- Two additional research-focussed staff have been appointed in both HR and Finance supported through research overhead income
- Research Support System (RSS) has been upgraded and re-launched

### Actions in Progress

- Web pages redesign to be completed in November 2005
- Implementation of new Research Strategy

## 2. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

Please outline the Unit's response to the recommendations in the Peer Review Group Report. It would be helpful (for the external reader) to identify any areas where similar recommendations emanated from both the Self-Assessment Report and the Peer Review Group Report.

The Unit must make a response to ALL the recommendations in the Report. The Unit (and the University) are required, under the Universities Act (1997) to implement the recommendations of the Report, unless they are unreasonable or impractical.

The PRG report presented its recommendations using the following criteria:

**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 timescale.

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

- A: Administrative Unit (OVPR)
- U: University Executive/Senior Management

The Unit response is outlined in the table below

### Recommendations for and Responses to Quality Improvement

Recommendation in Peer Review Group Report	Unit Response in Quality Improvement Plan	University Management Response (if applicable)
1. Define more clearly the key, unique roles of the OVPR with respect to the university's mission (P2U)	<p>The OVPR mission is to proactively help in '<b>building and sustaining research excellence</b>' at DCU.</p> <p>The overall university mission has been defined in the University Strategic Plan 2006-2008. One of the key strategic objectives of the new university Strategy is to be an</p>	A clearer definition of the OVPR role has been achieved through the development of the DCU strategic plan.

	'internationally recognised...research-intensive university'. The VPR has been responsible for the development the university new Research Strategy 2006-2009. The VPR will also be responsible for the implementation of this plan.	
2. Improve the robustness of the OVPR, alleviating its vulnerability to staff changes. (P1A)	Ms. Mary Adsley, originally on secondment from HR, has now been appointed on a permanent basis to the OVPR. However, three other staff members remain on fixed-term contracts.  This is outside the control of the OVPR.	Partial progress has been made.  The university encourages the OVPR to make recommendations in relation to the position of their staff member to the University Budget committee.
3. Meet justified expansion of staff complement to achieve the mission of the OVPR effectively (P2U)	Since the Peer Review Group site visit an additional Research Officer has been appointed to specifically support increased EU Framework activities. Also Ms. Kaylene Atkinson has been replaced.  <u>Completed</u>	See above
4. Address the issue of the limitations of the accommodation of the unit to increase its effectiveness (P2U)	Consideration be given to the relocation of the OVPR to a more suitable location on campus. Of particular concern is the lack of dedicated meeting space and the	The university recognises that these issues need to be addressed and will procedures into place to address them.

	<p>location of the OVPR peripheral from the main research community.</p> <p>This is outside the control of the OVPR.</p>	
5. Reaffirm the prime role of RC (and the VPR as Chair)(P1U)	<p>The RC is responsible for the overall research strategic and policy framework for the university. It will play a central role in monitoring and supporting the implementation of the Research Strategy 2006-2008. Also the RC will continue to play a central role in the development and support of large institutional research proposals as evident from its recent activities with the internal shortlisting process of the institutional submission to the HEA PRTLI successor programme.</p> <p>The calendar of meeting dates for the RC will be agreed at the start of each academic year and updated minutes of each meeting will be made available on the redesigned OVPR website.</p>	The university recognises the central role of the RC in the development and support of research within DCU.
6. Establish, say, a Strategy Implementation Sub-committee (SISC) of the RC to include the Faculty Associate Deans of Research (connecting in the Faculty Research Committees and their	<p>Research Structures, including Research Committee and Research Advisory Panel to be reviewed as part of the implementation of the Research Strategy.</p>	This issue is recognised to play a central part in the future of research implementation. Associate Deans and Theme Leaders might be given a leading role in this, however the precise nature of the Strategy Implementation Structures is not clear, as yet.

<p>activities to the RC) and/or Executive Deans, plus the Theme Leaders, and the Heads of the National Centres to more effectively bridge research strategy, policy and operations at DCU (P1U)</p>	<p><u>Completion date:</u> March 2006</p>	
<p>7. Clarify to the research community the University's policy regarding the introduction of Executive Faculties (with its hierarchical connotations) vis a vis the former School-based (flatter) structure. This would particularly help less senior members of the university to understand the roles of the OVPR and its concomitant committees and assist in clarifying their expectations of these bodies. It is imperative that the new administrative structures based around executive faculties and theme leaders are given clear roles in a wider university context (P3U)</p>	<p>This is an on-going issue as the Executive Faculty structures are currently being bedded down and key appointments, including Assoc. Deans for Research are in place. Also a number of the Theme Leaders have yet to be appointed. In the context of the Research Strategy implementation plan, the review of research structures will address, in consultation with the University Executive, the role of Associate Deans for Research and the Theme Leaders.</p> <p><u>Completion date:</u> March 2006</p>	<p>Executive Faculties and Associate Deans are now in place and their roles are becoming clarified through practice.</p> <p>The whole issue will have to be readdressed in the light of experience gained in 12 months.</p>
<p>8. Confirm the role of the VPR. This to include the internal (operational and formulation of research strategy) and external (championing the DCU activities and contributions to various schemes and activities) roles. The establishment of the Director of RSS (primarily engaged with the</p>	<p>The VPR's primary role and activities are focussed on the strategic and policy research framework of DCU with support from the OVPR staff.</p>	<p>The university agrees that the primary role of the OVPR is to focus on the strategic and policy research framework of DCU. The issue has been resolved to a large extent through practice and the strategic planning process.</p>

operational activities) post should free the VPR to address the more strategic functions with greater vitality and focus. (P2U)		
9. We recommend that the VPR be fully briefed and indeed to be part of the special project initiatives run by the SPU. (P1U)	Greater communication and integration with the SPU has taken place in relation to all new research initiatives involving the SPU.  <u>Completed</u>	The SPU is not in existence, any more. There is now close co-operation of the OVPR with the President's Office.
10. Consideration should be given to the development of a new position of Dean for Graduate Studies. (P2U)	Dean of Graduate studies or equivalent to be appointed.  <u>Completion date:</u> Start of 2006/2007 academic year	This has been identified as a wider issue and it is part of the strategic plan 2005-2008 which was recently agreed.
11. A review of the role of the RAP Committee is recommended (P2U)	The role of RAP will be reviewed in the context of the 2006-2009 Research Strategic Plan.  <u>Completion date:</u> March 2006	This is subsumed in the strategic plan.
12. Consideration to be given to the VPR being a part of the INVENT Board. (P3U)	VPR has been appointed to the Board of INVENT.  <u>Completed</u>	The university acknowledges the appointment of VPR to the board of INVENT.
13. We recommend that dedicated personnel be recruited to deal with research in HR and Finance. We believe that this is the case with	Two additional research-focused support staff have been recruited in HR and an additional research accountant has been appointed (one	A positive impact of appointments in HR has been noted. The appointment has yet to be completed by FO.



<p>the new arrangement with HR but we would recommend that such an arrangement would also be undertaken by Finance Department. (P1U)</p>	<p>further appointment is pending) in Finance, funded through the DCU SFI Overhead Investment Plans.</p>	
<p>14. Consideration of putting in place SLAs between researchers and HR / Finance is necessary. (P3U)</p>	<p>SLA is in place with HR. SLA to be put in place with the Finance Dept.  <u>Completion date:</u> March 2006</p>	<p>SLA is to be put in place with the Finance Office.</p>
<p>15. Develop mechanisms to assist with the transition from a teaching dominated culture to a research-led culture. (P3A/U)</p>	<p>At both the strategic and operational levels efforts will continue to assist in the change in culture, such change initiatives include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development and implementation of new university Research Strategy</li> <li>2. Research Support Unit fortnightly meetings (HR, Finance, Library and INVENT) chaired by the Director OVPR will be used as one of the mechanisms to change the culture in the university central support units.</li> <li>3. Establishment of SLA's between the OVPR and support units</li> <li>4. Support for the development and implementation of integrated IT-systems to support all aspects of camps research activities</li> <li>5. Continued efforts to increase the profile and overall awareness of the support available from the</li> </ol>	<p>A complementary and balanced interaction between both aspects is embedded in the DCU strategic plan 2005-2008</p>

	OVPR.	
16. Develop a mechanism to assist with proposal preparation (one particular issue being that of EU proposals) (P1A)	<p>A number of initiatives have been taken to provide additional support mechanisms for research proposal preparation, these include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The recruitment of an additional research officer specifically to support in proposal development and greater DCU activity in FP7.</li> <li>2. Launch of Researcher Development programme with training in all aspects of research proposal development and project management.</li> </ol> <p>The OVPR will develop a specific strategy to support the development of EU FP7 proposals.</p> <p><u>Completion date:</u> October 2006</p>	The university supports OVPR action on this issue.
17. Support the development of clear reports in Agresso which are acceptable and user friendly by the researchers themselves and then provide training to the research community (P1A)	<p>Under the remit of the Finance Dept. The OVPR will work in conjunction with FO to organise training.</p>	The university considers this to be a desirable development and encourages the introduction of such courses a number of times per year.
18. Consideration should be given to some form of incentivisation of the researchers to keep Genius/RSS	<p>Significant steps have been taken to date to relaunch and to incentivise the use of the RSS/Genius system.</p>	The university is conscious of the need for a good and workable system of research records and has supported the introduction of Genius/RSS.

records up to date. (P2U/A)	The system has been completely upgraded and researchers can now avail of additional functionality including integrated electronic storage of research contracts, integration with DCU staff phone directory and ongoing development of an institutional e-repository in library. Further planning is ongoing to ensure DCU is well positioned to embrace Full Economic Costing and to facilitate the collation of research performance data at the national level by the Chief Science Advisors Office.	
19. Restructure the web pages to reduce burden on standard FAQs and ensure members of the OVPR utilise the web pages in their interactions with the community. (P2A)	Total redesign of the OVPR web pages is ongoing.  <u>Completion date:</u> November 2005	The university acknowledges that significant progress is being made in this respect.
20. Develop mechanism to aid researchers at pre-proposal stages at a general and coordinated level. (P1A)	A number of mechanisms have already been implemented to date, including: A. Greater staff resources available to assist in proposal development. B. Researcher Development Training programme developed and launched in co-operation with HR. Future modules will address proposal preparation and contract law for example.	The university recognises that great strides have been made in this respect. (See also recommendation 16)

	<p>C. Engagement with researchers at a very early stage in the development of SFI-CSET and other major proposal developments.</p> <p>D. Co-ordination of funding agency seminars with approaching proposal submission deadlines.</p> <p>Further steps will be taken with the development of a coherent strategy for FP7 participation.</p> <p><u>Completion date:</u> October 2006</p>	
<p>21. Further development of matrices and benchmarking within the office. (P2A)</p>	<p>Research performance and where available benchmarking data is collated on an ongoing basis by the OVPR and this data will be made available on the OVPR website. The upgraded Research Support System plays a central role in the future capture of metrics and will also allow for remote capture of metrics by faculties and schools as required.</p> <p>Annual performance data will be published on the OVPR web page also.</p>	<p>The university recognises the need for a suitable centralised and user friendly system of research metrics.</p>

## **PRIORITISED RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

This section should only contain a list, prioritised by the Quality Implementation Committee, of resource requirements necessary to implement the recommendations outlined in the Self- Assessment and Peer Review Group Reports. Estimates of the cost involved should also be included.

Resources for Quality Improvement will be allocated by the University under 2 separate funds:

### **1. Improve the robustness of the OVPR, alleviating its vulnerability to staff changes. (P1A)**

Three of the seven staff within the unit are on fixed-term contracts.

The Peer Group report has highlighted the central role played by the OVPR in supporting the university mission to become a 'research-intensive' university. However, 40% of the staff complement are on fixed-term contracts. This poses a significant risk for the OVPR in the context of business planning continuity.

### **2. Address the issue of the limitations of the accommodation of the unit to increase its effectiveness (P2U)**

The Peer Group report recommended a review of the infrastructural needs of this key unit to address the significant space limitations in its current location and in particular 1. the lack of dedicated meeting space and 2. the location of the OVPR peripheral from the main research community.

## **SUMMARY OF THE OVPR ONE-YEAR PLAN**

- 1. Launch and implementation of Research Strategy 2006-2009**
  - a. Carryout Research Assessment Exercise
  - b. Establish high level Research Foresight Group
  - c. Launch of DCU Research Fellowship programme
- 2. Continued investment in DCU research infrastructure through research overheads and other resources.**
- 3. Development of an institutional PRTL successor programme submission**
- 4. Redesign of OVPR website**
- 5. Comprehensive Research Support System development plan**
  - a. Updating of researcher profile data
  - b. Electronic storage of all active research contracts
  - c. Integration with new institutional e-repository in the DCU library
  - d. Pre-planning for the implementation of national research performance data by the Office of the Chief Science Advisor
  - e. Pre-planning for the potential introduction of a Full Economic Cost model
- 6. Concerted strategy for the enhanced activity and success of DCU researchers in the EU 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme**
- 7. Development of *Good Research Practice Guide***
- 8. Documentation Management**
  - a. Design and implement new central office filing system
  - b. Electronic storage and contract management via RSS
  - c. Development of SOP's covering the roles of the Director and the support staff that will assist in training new staff and also for business continuity planning

## **SUMMARY OF THE OVPR FIVE-YEAR PLAN**

- 1. Delivery on 2006-2008 Research Strategic goals, including:**
  - a. Research Assessment
  - b. Strategic recruitment of researchers
  - c. Development of Fourth Level infrastructure
- 2. Continued enhancement of the Research focussed culture at DCU**
- 3. Development of integrated cross-campus Management Information Systems to support research and related university activities**

## APPENDIX ONE

Please list the members of:

- **Unit Quality Committee (for the Self-Assessment Report)**

Prof. Eugene Kennedy	Vice-President for Research
Ms. Mary Adsley	Research Officer (Grade V)
Ms. Kaylene Atkinson	Research Officer (Administrator I)
Ms. Fiona Brennan	Research Officer (Grade V)
Dr. Declan Raftery	Director (Administrator III - Chair)
Ms. Fiona Lyons	Secretary (participated in a number of meetings and the quality away day)
  
- **Peer Review Group**

Prof. Vincent J Cunnane	Vice-President Research, University of Limerick – (Chair)
Prof Stephen R Reid	Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, UMIST) University of Manchester
Prof. Paul F Whelan	School of Electronic Engineering, DCU
Ms Ursula Baxter	Manager of Faculty Administration, DCUBS (Rapporteur)
  
- **Unit Quality Committee (for the Quality Improvement Plan)**

Prof. Eugene Kennedy	Vice-President for Research
Ms. Mary Adsley	Research Officer
Ms. Ana Terres	Research Officer
Ms. Fiona Brennan	Research Officer
Dr. Mark Rushforth	Research Officer
Dr. Declan Raftery	Director (Chair)