

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



Peer Review Group Report for Estates Office

- ◆ Ms. Jeannie M Rice, Director, Office of Facilities Information Services, Vanderbilt University (Chair)
- ◆ Mr. Brian Hand, Director of Buildings, University of Limerick
- ◆ Mr. Pat Clarke, Head of Internal Administration, Enterprise Ireland
- ◆ Senior Academic, Dublin City University, Prof. Barry McMullin
- ◆ Internal Rapporteur, Dublin City University, Rev John Gilligan

**Date 30 April 2007**

## 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

## 1. The Unit

### Location of the Unit

The Estates Office is located in a number of areas on campus:

- The Estates Office Building
- Workshops and Stores
- Security Control Room
- Post Room

### Staff

#### **Senior Management Structure**

The unit is managed by the Director of Estates, Mike Kelly. The other key management personnel are:

Gerry O'Donnell	Senior Administration Manager
Gerard McEvoy	Assistant Estates Manager
Raymond Wheatley	Security Services Superintendent
Liam O'Reilly	Buildings Facilities Co-ordinator
Michael Woods	Mechanical & Electrical Supervisor
Kevin Allen	Senior Groundsman
Kathleen Whelan	Cleaning & Waste Manager
Dave Faherty	Assistant Facilities Manager
Richard Kelly	Estates Manager

#### ESTATES OFFICE STAFF \*

SERVICE	STAFF IN POST		TOTAL
	Full Time	Part Time	
Director	1		1
Estates Manager	1		1
Senior Admin Assistant	1		1
Facilities Engineers	2		2
Maintenance	6		6
Security	20		20
Cleaning & Waste Mgmt.	1	1	2
Cleaners	12	1	13
Grounds	3		3
Helpdesk Secretariat	2		2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>

## Product / Processes

The Estates Office is responsible for the University Building Programme and for providing various services to the University including Maintenance, Grounds, Portering, Security, Cleaning, Waste Management and the provision for Health and Safety in those activities.

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

### The Co-ordinating Committee

Gerry O'Donnell, Senior Administrator  
Kathleen Whelan, Cleaning & Waste Manager  
Michael Woods, Mechanical and Electrical Supervisor  
Richard Kelly, Estates Manager

### Methodology Adopted

This committee met on a number of occasions to help co-ordinate the preparation of the Self Assessment Report.

A number of key activities what led to the preparation of this report are outlined below:

Presentation to Estates Office by Director of Quality Promotion	July 2006
Peer Group Nominations	September 2006
Management Away Day	December 2006
In-House Staff Email Questionnaire	December 2006
Estates Office In-House Quality Review Day	January 2007
Focus Group Meetings	January 2007

This Self-Assessment Report was issued on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2007. The Peer Group Visit took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1<sup>st</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007.

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

### The Review Group

Ms. Jeannie M Rice, Director, Office of Facilities Information Services, Vanderbilt University (Chair)  
Mr. Brian Hand, Director of Buildings, University of Limerick  
Mr. Pat Clarke, Head of Internal Administration, Enterprise Ireland  
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## Site Visit Programme

### Timetable for the Review Visit to the Estates Office

#### Day 1 (Wednesday 28 February 2007)

Time	Activity	Responsibility
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group, Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Room DG11 (Bea Orpen Building)	QPU
15.00 – 15.30	Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days	QPU
15.30 – 17.00	Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with Estates Office co-ordination committee	QPU Estates Office
19.30	Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group , Head of Unit and Unit Quality Co-ordinating Committee and Director of Quality Promotion	QPU Estates Office

#### Day 2 (Thursday, 1 March 2007)

Time	Activity	Responsibility
09.00 – 10.00	<b>Meeting with Senior Management Group Room: President's Office, Albert College</b>	Review Group QPU
10.00 – 13.00	Meetings with Group members of the Estates Office in Q157: 10:00 Director of Estates/Estates Manager 10:15 Administration/Helpdesk/Facilities (10.45 Coffee/Tea) 11:00 Maintenance Team 11:30 Security Team 12:00 Grounds Team 12:30 Cleaning and Waste Management Team	Estates Office
13.00 – 14.00	Brief Discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion followed by working (sandwich) lunch for members of Peer Review Group only in Q157	QPU Estates Office
14.00 - 17.00	Meetings with representative selections of stakeholder groups in Q157: 14:00 Academic Staff 14:45 Central Support Units (15.30 Coffee/Tea) 16:00 Students Union 16:15 Stakeholder Groups 16:45 Contractors/Consultants/Suppliers	Estates Office
19.30	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group	Review Group QPU

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**Day 3 (Friday, 2 March 2007)**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting of Peer Review Group to review previous day's findings and prepare for 3 <sup>rd</sup> day of visit Q157	Review Group QPU
10.00 – 11.00	Tour of Facilities	Quality Committee
11.00 – 11.15	Tea/coffee Q157	Estates Office
11.15 – 12.00	Meeting with Line Manager (Martin Conry) Q157	Estates Office
12.00 – 12.30	Brief Discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion, Q157	Review Group QPU
12.30 – 13.30	Working (sandwich) lunch for members of Peer Review Group	Estates Office
13.30 – 16.00	Preparation of 1 <sup>st</sup> Draft of Final Report (15.30 coffee/tea)	Review Group QPU
16.00 – 16.30	Exit presentation to <u>ALL</u> staff of the Unit to be made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of the Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group, Room: Q218	Estates Office
16.30	Conclusion of Peer Review Group visit	Review Group QPU Estates Office Quality Committee

**Methodology**

The Peer Review Group (PRG) decided that they would work as a team and this gave all members of the review group an opportunity to collectively meet with and interview individual staff members and representative groups. Time management was a difficulty particularly on Thursday when they felt they had too many people to see. Some people in the central support units turned up very late and this had a knock on effect on the timetable.

**Schedule of Activity**

They very much kept to the timetable. Meetings were held in the Bea Orpen, Albert College and the Business School. The PRG had a walk through the Henry Grattan Building and visited the Estates Office, Security and the Hub. In general, the meetings with staff went very well. The Estates Office staff were very friendly, open and frank in their discussions with the PRG. There was a strong feeling that they needed more resources but were making the best of what they had. The PRG observed that the meeting with the Senior Management Group (SMG) was scheduled

much too early in the review process and would have been more effective had it been held on the final day.

There were only two senior Academic staff represented and the PRG felt that they would have got a better insight if they had met with a more general body of Academics. The PRG was disappointed that the Students Union President was the sole representative from the student body, and therefore only one student view was represented. It was noteworthy, that the Students Union President was the only person to have strong negative comments against the Estates Office. The PGR felt that the Stakeholder group made up of -Contractors/Consultants/Suppliers was over represented.

All the groups apart from the Student representative were very positive about the Estates Office staff. However, they were very critical about the Helpdesk – many saying they did not have an opportunity to speak to a staff member and thus had to leave a message. Having left a message there was no feedback on when a particular task or job would be done. All of those interviewed felt that the Estates Office was under resourced. The upkeep of the toilets in the Henry Grattan, Business School and the Hub was a problem. Space was an issue and it was felt that the Estates Office would benefit from the appointment of a Space manager. Parking was also a big issue and PRG felt that they were unfairly blamed when problems with parking arose.

### **Views of the Self-Assessment Report**

- The PRG found the assessment descriptive, providing a plentiful supply of information.
- The report did not give a clear understanding of the role and functions of each of the separate services nor did it reflect the enthusiasm that the PRG experienced during the site visit.
- The PRG noticed that the disability issue was invisible in the self-assessment report. It also noted that the campus has expanded greatly in recent years with no major increase in staff.
- The PRG felt that the campus lacked colour and that this should be a priority to improve the appearance of the campus.
- There was little sense of a strategic plan for the unit and it came across as fragmented and failed to give a sense of the unit as a whole.
- The PRG believe that the campus due to age, now requires a planned maintenance programme for its building and hard surfaces in order to protect and enhance the campus image.

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

##### **Background and Context**

The Estates Office is responsible for the University Building Programme upon completion and for providing various services to the University including Maintenance, Grounds, Portering, Security, Cleaning, Waste management and provision for Health and Safety in those areas. The PRG recommends that an external consultant needs to come in and work alongside the staff to review the Estates Office with a view to improving services to its clients and develop a strategic plan for moving forward. Its core mission needs to be clarified. The PRG also felt the need to appoint a part-time Health and Safety officer to the Estates Office. The PRG noted that responding to crises seems to be the main task of the Estates Office and they appear to have little time to analyse and reflect on what they do. An area that has created a great deal of concern to staff is the continuing restrictions and uncertainty around funding and resources of specific services and the unit in general. While PRG recognised the concerns that relate to the specific commercialisation of services, the PRG suggests that the tension around this issue needs to be worked out between the Estates Office and the University senior management team. It was also felt that senior management would appear not to be aware of the frustrations and difficulties that the Estates Staff have to deal with. It was very evident from all sections of staff that their frustrations were not addressed.

##### **Organisation, Management and Planning**

The PRG appreciated the level of documentation and critical analysis provided by the Estates Office for the visit. However the PRG also found that it was only after the individual meetings that the PRG were in a position to appreciate the level of positivity experienced by the service users. While service users were critical of some aspects of the service they appreciated the commitment of staff working with limited resources. The PRG were amazed by the positive staff morale and were concerned whether or not it would continue if no extra resources were provided. The PRG suggested that the Estates Office could be provided with better accommodation – especially the workshops.

##### **Functions, Activities and Processes**

It was noted that the facilities and services that are provided within the Estates Office and in conjunction with other constraints are often insufficient to provide complete satisfaction to all the campus. The car park and helpdesk are used as examples. The communication within and outside the Estates Office needs to be improved. The new system for the helpdesk should be installed as soon as possible. However, the PRG sense that this system will not solve the problem unless the maintenance supervisors fill in the boxes when the task has been completed and provide feedback where necessary. The PRG recommends that funds need to be provided to improve the appearance of the grounds and some of the buildings. This could be seen as an effective *marketing tool* in attracting students to the University and also show its commitment to student life on campus.



## **Customer Perspective**

Two methods of surveys were used to analyse the views of the various customer groups. A staff questionnaire and focus group meetings were held with a wide selection of the University Community. In general the feedback was positive but customers were critical of Car parking and the Helpdesk. The feedback from the majority of customer groupings was that the Estates Office is operating in difficult circumstances and with insufficient resources. The staff members are broadly perceived to be courteous, diligent and practical. It is acknowledged that a more proactive approach is needed to ensure improved levels of customer satisfaction through providing information on time expected for completion of job/work requests and giving accurate feedback on completion of jobs/work.

## **Staff Perspective**

It was agreed that there was a good skills base within the unit. Communication channels need to be improved both internally and externally. It was suggested among staff that more recognition and possibly some rewards were needed both internally and from DCU senior management in terms of both their day-to-day activities and their management of special events. The Estates Office has had major achievements in Security, Energy and grounds competitions recently but no recognition from senior University personnel. There were concerns in all areas that whilst the size of the campus area has practically doubled in the past eight years there has been no major increase in staffing levels in the Estates office. Due to this there is a strong dependence on outsourcing and currently there are insufficient resources available to cover leave or staff absence.

## **Management of Resources**

- ◆ Estates Office staff are highly motivated, competent, and clearly dedicated to the betterment of the University
- ◆ Estates Office staff command high respect and appreciation across the University community
- ◆ Recognition of strong performance with very constrained resources
- ◆ High quality of work completed
- ◆ Show remarkable success in building positive working relationships with customers
- ◆ Very strong impression of positive attitude under difficult circumstances
- ◆ Strong expertise in maintenance and consequent ability to enhance the quality of future buildings
- ◆ Exceptional achievements in:
  - i. Energy efficiency
  - ii. Waste management and recycling
  - iii. Security technology
- ◆ Generally very positive view of overall housekeeping/cleanliness of facilities

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

**Strengths** – A dedicated, professional staff with a strong sense of ‘teamwork’ within functional areas of unit. The fact that services are under resourced is acknowledged and understood by colleagues in academic and administrative departments.

**Weaknesses** – It was felt among staff that more recognition and possibly some rewards were needed both internally and from DCU Senior Management. There appears to be an over-dependence on outsourcing especially for small maintenance work.

**Opportunities** – More refresher courses would be of help. There could be improved training for first aid, health and safety, personal development, induction training, cross training, shadow training where staff from different areas could learn about what is happening in other areas. Also training should be provided to assist with dealing with difficult and possibly aggressive customers.

**Concerns** – Staff ‘retention’ could be an issue. Morale is good at the moment but could decline if resources /pressures stay the same. On maintenance items, who is the person responsible and what dictates works for completion? The helpdesk should monitor complaints but not give feedback. Feedback is very necessary but it must come from the maintenance person responsible.

### **Management of Resources**

- ◆ Inadequate resources for assigned mission
- ◆ Reactive mode of operation
- ◆ Poor communication with customers about open issues
- ◆ SMG appears not to have adequate appreciation of challenges faced by Estates Office staff
- ◆ Many staff operating at high stress levels.

## 6. Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendations are qualified by an indication of priority as follows:

- 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 Unit.

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

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

	Addressee	Priority	PRG Recommendation (Draft Report)
1	A	P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expedite deployment of new web-based work request system</li> <li>➤ Define triage criteria and responsibility</li> <li>➤ Institute active monitoring and analysing of backlog</li> <li>➤ Achieve continuous improvement in service level</li> <li>➤ Consistent, timely, customer feedback</li> <li>➤ Create accountability</li> </ul>

<b>2</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop a Quality Handbook, including guidelines, policies and procedures. This process would benefit from involvement by an external expert, and should specifically evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of the staff allocated for each aspect of the Unit's responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>AU</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Integrate Project Management Office into the Estates Office, and reporting through the Director of the Estates Office.</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review effectiveness of management structure and organisation</li> <li>➤ Identify and implement required staff training</li> <li>➤ Empower more distributed responsibility and decision making</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clarify space management policy</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Initiate digital archival and indexing of all as-built drawings and maintenance manuals</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>P2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Monitor any negative impact of commercialisation activities on core mission</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>P1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Maintain the physical assets of the University to reflect excellence and leadership through foresight</li> </ul>
<b>9</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Create and implement landscape development plan</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Consider creating a representative committee to improve car park procedures, policies, sanctions</li> </ul>
<b>11</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Investigate a more flexible out-of-hours working policy, based on line management responsibility</li> </ul>

<b>12</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P3</b>	➤ Institute effective mechanism for University recognition of exceptional service
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