Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement

Programme for Academic Units

2007-2008

Peer Review Group Report

for the

Office of the Theme Leaders

Ms. Kathy Quinn, Director of Finance, Dublin City Council (Chair)
Prof. Bernie Hannigan, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Strategic Projects, University of Ulster
Mr. Brian Trench, School of Communications, Dublin City University
Ms. Miriam Corcoran, Sub-Librarian, Library, Dublin City University (Rapporteur)

April 9-11 2008

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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

1. The Unit

1.1 Location of the Unit

The OTL is located on the ground floor of the School of Computing building (L) in offices formerly occupied by the Centre for Software Engineering. This building also houses the offices of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, the Access Office and the Student Recruitment Office.

The OTL office space comprises four private offices, an open plan office space and a number of open areas providing additional seating and storage space. The OTL representative in "DCU in the Community" has office space in this facility on Shangan Road, Ballymun. This facility is sponsored by Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. In addition, the office is currently negotiating with the National Digital Research Centre for office space to be assigned to one of its projects.

1.2 Staff

Name	Title	Assignment	Status
Ms. Eva Carroll	Personal Assistant	Office	F/T
Ms. Deirdre Eustace	Researcher	Project	F/T
Ms. Arlene Flynn	Project Manager	Project	F/T
Ms. Catríona Fitzgerald	Administrative Assistant	Project	P/T
Ms. Niamh Gaynor	Researcher	Project	F/T
Dr. Mike Hopkins	Theme Leader (SDTI)	Office*	F/T
Ms. Mary Hyland	Researcher	Project	P/T
Dr. Peter Iordanov	Researcher	Project	F/T
Ms. Gloria Macri	Project Manager/PG Researcher	Project	F/T
Ms. Natalja Matease	Personal Assistant	Office	P/T
Mr. Niall McMahon	Research Officer (Provisional)	Office	F/T
Ms. Cathy McLoughlin	Administrative Assistant	Project	P/T
Ms. Aoileann Ní Mhurchú	Managing Editor/PG Researcher	Project	F/T
Ms. Veronica Mkilanya	PG Researcher	Project	F/T
Prof. Ronaldo Munck	Theme Leader (IISD)	Office	F/T
Ms. Catherine Murray	Project Manager	Project	F/T
Ms. Nora Shovelin	Researcher	Project	P/T
Ms. Elizabeth Yuko	PG Researcher	Project	F/T

* Theme Leader (SDTI) has some time formally allocated to Research Work

Note: *A full breakdown of staffing is contained in Appendix 1*

1.3 Product / Processes

1.3.1 Overview
The Office of the Theme Leaders was first considered through the strategic planning process which resulted in the University's strategic plan of 2001-2005, "Leading Change". In this plan, the University identified six strategic cross-disciplinary academic themes. The purpose of the themes was to provide a framework for cross-disciplinary collaboration, for investment in strategic initiatives and for developing strategic external partnerships. The chosen themes were:
   1. Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development

2. Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation
3. Information Technology and the Knowledge Society
4. Education and Learning
5. Business and Innovation
6. Life Sciences and Health in Society

The focus on strategic themes was to provide a framework for engaging more directly with decision makers in government, industry and the community and influencing change in society.

Basing the University's strategic development on the academic themes was re-affirmed in the DCU strategic planning process which began in 2005 and led to the strategy "Leadership Through Foresight". This strategy has at its core the DCU Academic Themes as drivers of innovation and change in all areas of the University's work. Importantly, the Theme Leaders were recently charged with guiding the Foresight process and therefore identified as integral to the future direction of DCU.

At the time of review two Theme Leaders were in post. The Theme Leader for Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development was appointed in 2004 and the Theme Leader for Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation was appointed in 2005. It was anticipated that the Theme Leader for Business and Innovation would be appointed shortly after this review concluded.

The Office of the Theme Leaders (OTL) itself was established to support the work of the Theme Leaders in 2004.

1.3.2   Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development.
Led by Professor Ronaldo Munck, the Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development (IISD) theme addresses a set of interacting contemporary issues, encapsulated in the globalisation and contestation paradigm. This theme addresses the question of Ireland's role in social, economic, political and cultural terms within the context of globalisation and examines how Ireland itself has been transformed by the processes of internationalisation and interculturalism.

The main project under the internationalisation strand is the co-ordination of the inter-university HEA/Irish Aid-funded Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building. Under the interculturalism strand, the key project is the Migration and Internationalisation Programme and the hosting of the inter-university journal "Translocations".

The social development element of the IISD theme is driving DCU's Civic Engagement Strategy (CES) which takes the research and teaching functions of the University out into the wider community to promote citizenship and critical enquiry. The two main elements of this strategy are DCU in the Community and DCU Science Shop.

1.3.3   Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation
Led by Dr Mike Hopkins, the Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation (SDTI) theme is concerned with addressing technical needs, bringing together researchers from many disciplines, seeking investment and developing external partnerships. A key element of the SDTI theme's work is the promotion of the University's Sustainability Initiative.

1.4 Organisation and Management

Within the OTL, the management structure is considered to be flat with almost all staff assigned to particular projects and reporting directly to the Theme Leaders. The Unit identifies three staff as working for the office as a whole (excluding the Theme Leaders) with the remainder (thirteen) working on projects. As the OTL is a relatively new office many of its internal structures and procedures are relatively informal. This structure facilitates the efficacy of informal and regular communication but formal DCU procedures are followed for staff recruitment, polices and procedures.

Within the DCU organisational and management structure the Theme Leaders report directly to the Deputy President.

1.5 Communication

The Unit Managers (Theme Leaders) meet all project researchers and staff regularly and communication is also conducted via email. Communication outside the OTL is largely conducted through personal contact and via telephone or email. The OTL has a high level DCU internet address and is linked to from every page within the DCU site.

2. The Self-Assessment Process

2.1 The Co-ordinating Committee

Mr. Niall McMahon (Chair)
Ms. Eva Carroll
Dr. Mike Hopkins
Ms. Gloria Macri
Ms. Natalja Matease
Prof. Ronaldo Munck
Ms. Catherine Murray

2.2 Methodology Adopted

The OTL quality review process commenced in 2007 with a full briefing from the Director of Quality Promotion. A Quality Co-ordinating Committee was established in October 2007 with Niall McMahon acting as Chair and overall co-ordinator of the self-assessment process. Internal communication on self-assessment activities was conducted mainly through individual discussions, email and the OTL website. An experimental online Office Quality forum (OQF) was set up to facilitate staff contributions to the review.

Internal stakeholder views were gathered through an anonymous online survey which ran to March 2008. A variety of feedback mechanisms were used including blogs, online comment boxes etc.

Internal staff satisfaction views were gathered through the OQF but it was noted in the Self Assessment Report (SAR) that no formal staff satisfaction metrics had been put in place and that the information gathered provided a purely qualitative measure of satisfaction.

All members of the Quality Co-ordinating Committee contributed to the drafting of various sections of the SAR and the Chair had overall editorial responsibility for collating and co-ordinating the final report.

3.   The Peer Review Group Process

3.1   The Review Group

▪   Ms. Kathy Quinn, Director of Finance, Dublin City Council (Chair)
▪   Prof. Bernie Hannigan, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Strategic Projects, University of Ulster
▪   Mr. Brian Trench, School of Communications, Dublin City University
▪   Ms. Miriam Corcoran, Sub-Librarian, Library, Dublin City University (Rapporteur)

A fifth reviewer had been invited to participate as an external member of the PRG but had withdrawn at short notice.

3.2   Site Visit Programme

Wednesday 9th April	
14.00	Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion
15.00	Private meeting of Peer Review Group
16.00	Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with Theme Leaders and Chair OTL Co-ordinating Committee including presentation from OTL
19.30	Dinner for Peer Review Group and OTL staff
Thursday 10th April	
9.00	Meeting with Theme Leaders
10.00	Meeting with OTL staff
11.00	Site visit to "DCU in the Community" facility, Shangan Road, Ballymun
12.15	Meeting with Chair of OTL Quality Co-ordinating Committee
12.45	Working lunch including meeting with Head of Strategic Planning & Administration
13.45	Meeting with consultant to "DCU Foresight" Ms. Sheila Moorcroft
14.30	Meeting with DCU Senior staff
15.31	Meeting with other DCU staff
16.00	Meeting with Associate Deans
16.30	Meeting with Director of Quality Promotion
Friday 11th April	
9.00	Preparation for meeting with Senior Management Group
10.00	Meeting with Senior Management Group
11.30	Meeting with Theme Leaders
12.00	Preparation of first draft of final report and exit presentation
13.00	Working lunch including meeting with Director of Quality Promotion
13.30	Preparation of first draft of final report and exit presentation
15.00	Exit Presentation

3.3   Methodology

The Peer Review Group (PRG) received the Self-Assessment Report and associated appendices three weeks in advance of the site visit. As the SAR heavily referenced

the analysis and recommendations of the 2007 "Buizer Report"[1] a request for this report was made to Director of Quality. This external reviewer's report, which had been commissioned as a requirement of the original Atlantic Philanthropies funding, along with clarification on a number of factual questions, was circulated to the PRG in advance of the visit. Additional documentation on the University's strategies was also circulated.

The visit commenced with a briefing from the Director of Quality Promotion which clarified both the review process and the roles of PRG members. This briefing was followed by a preparatory meeting of the PRG at which Ms Kathy Quinn was selected as Chair and Ms Miriam Corcoran was confirmed as Rapporteur. During this meeting some concerns with the schedule of activities were identified. It was agreed that the schedule had not provided for opportunities to meet with external stakeholders and furthermore that meetings with internal stakeholders had not been fully confirmed and attendance lists were not provided. Following discussion the timetable for the visit was revised to provide opportunities for focussed meetings with internal stakeholders and to conduct a site visit to the off-campus facility "DCU in the Community" in Ballymun. Specific meetings were requested with Faculty Deans, Mr. Gordon McConnell (Head of Strategic Planning and Administration) and Ms. Sheila Moorcroft, Consultant to DCU Foresight.

Through liaison with the Director of Quality Promotion and the OTL the original site visit programme was modified and restructured as above.

All members of the PRG attended all meetings with individual members taking the lead in raising identified issues with each group. This approach was successful in ensuring that key issues were covered in the available time.

Members of the PRG took individual responsibility for drafting discrete sections of the report. Sections of the report were drafted during the course of the visit and the report was finalised via email communication, co-ordinated by the Rapporteur. The exit presentation to the OTL was conducted by the Chair and consisted of summary draft recommendations.

3.4   Overall Comments on the Visit

The DCU Quality Promotion Unit provided appropriate and sufficient information for the PRG at all stages of the process and the PRG welcomed the liaison and support provided by the Director of Quality Promotion during the visit.

As noted above the initial site visit programme was inadequate in terms of meetings arranged and the constituency of attendance at those meetings. A comprehensive restructuring of the programme was required as a first point of business and a consequence of this was that throughout the visit meetings could only be confirmed to the PRG at short notice.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that the meetings that were held proved extremely valuable. Internal stakeholders were frank and open with the PRG and this greatly assisted in the identification and clarification of key issues. The PRG also welcomed the full and enthusiastic engagement of the OTL staff throughout the visit and the assistance of the Chair of the OTL Quality Co-ordinating Committee in co-ordinating meetings and the off-site visit.

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[1] "Report of the External Reviewer of the Office of Strategic Themes". James L. Buizer

The PRG was impressed by the off-campus facility "DCU in the Community" in Ballymun. The PRG had the opportunity to drop in on a class in progress and also had an opportunity for discussion about community engagement initiatives with relevant project managers.

3.5   View of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG agreed that the SAR (SAR) was insufficient on a number of grounds. Firstly there were gaps in the provision of factual information which limited the ability of the PRG to gain a comprehensive overview of the operational functions and activities of the OTL. Secondly the report did not provide the degree of critical analysis of its activities that would be expected in such a process. Thirdly, the report contained few references to external stakeholders' of the Office; this was all the more noticeable as the OTL has developed many external relations.

4.   Findings of the Review Group

4.1   Background and Context

The Office of the Theme Leaders (OTL) was founded in 2004 to implement Dublin City University's Academic Themes. Academic activities in DCU have traditionally developed at a devolved level, strategically co-ordinated through Schools under a Faculty structure. The Faculty structure was re-inforced through the appointment of Executive Deans after 2001. The structure has led to many innovations and to the interdisciplinary activities which are a defining DCU characteristic. Building on these strengths, the University decided in adopting its strategic plan, "Leading Change" to set up a coordinated interdisciplinary framework for developing further initiatives. This framework was expressed through the establishment of six new Academic Themes which would guide DCU and inform its priorities.

The six themes identified were (1) Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development (IISD), (2) Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation (SDTI), (3) Information Technology and the Knowledge Society, (4) Education and Learning, (5) Business and Innovation and (6) Life Sciences and Health in Society.

The OTL was established to implement this strategic initiative. It was intended that each of the six themes would be led by a Theme Leader. The establishment of the OTL was enabled by a 2003 donation of €2.65 million from Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). This funding was to support the implementation of a new thematic academic leadership structure and to underwrite the initiation of the programme.

In 2004 the Theme Leader for IISD was appointed. This was followed in 2006 by the appointment of the Theme Leader for SDTI. A Leader for the Business and Innovation theme was appointed in 2004 and was briefly in post. This post was filled on a part-time basis shortly after the PRG visit. Theme Leaders for the remaining three themes have not yet been appointed.

Commitment to the themes was re-affirmed in DCU's 2006 – 2008 strategy "Leadership through Foresight" as the OTL was established more firmly as an integral part of the strategic management structure and as drivers of the DCU Foresight exercise.

The OTL was scheduled to commence its quality review process in 2007 and this preparation coincided with a separate and required external review process. It was a condition of the Atlantic Philanthropies' funding that an external review of the OTL be conducted to assess the work of the OTL to date and to make recommendations for future scope and direction. This review was undertaken by Mr. James Buizer of Arizona State University and the report issued in June 2007. The findings and recommendations of the Buizer report heavily influenced the development of the quality SAR.

4.2   DCU Strategy and Theme Leaders Office

4.2.1   Strategic Context
Dublin City University (DCU) has a well expressed strategy based on eight core aims. One of these aims is to '*Integrate the Academic Themes as drivers of innovation and change'*. DCU's strategic statement has been well publicised and is a point of reference within many corporate documents and research applications. This strategic aim represents DCU's vision of channelling the immense ability and resource within the University to meet emerging demands in society. The Office of the Theme Leaders (OTL) is considered by Senior Management as the change agent through which this adaptive response to emerging demands will be built.

4.2.2   Concept of Themes
During the course of interviews held, the view was widely expressed by staff at all levels that the concept of overarching themes was good and appropriate to DCU. Further, there was consensus around the ongoing requirement to operate on an interdisciplinary basis. Negative responses emerged on consideration of the application of the concept of themes to faculty work and plans. Many definitions were put forward for the role of the OTL demonstrating a lack of clarity of how the concept of themes has been integrated into DCU.

4.2.3   Strategic Review
Over the course of this review, the PRG were informed by Senior Management that the concept of Themes and the OTL will remain a core strand to the revised DCU Strategy. As part of the review of strategy shortly to commence, the format, role and deliverables of the OTL will be considered.

4.2.4   Mainstreaming
The PRG consider that the strategic review is an opportunity to review and strengthen structures for linkages between the OTL and the faculties. A key strand of this review should be the detailing of arrangements and protocols for the mainstreaming of initiatives or projects commenced by OTL. If the purpose of the OTL is the integration of Themes across DCU, then conversely the OTL does not have purpose in the operation of facilities, running of projects or other regular business that should be properly carried out within the faculty structure.

4.3   Organisation and Management

4.3.1   Faculty Structure
The University is primarily structured around faculties, managed through a structure of Associate Deans reporting to Executive Deans. The OTL reports to the Deputy President, as do the Executive Deans. Consequently, a core demand of the role of

the Theme Leader is to influence, engage, support and collaborate with the existing faculty based structure, through both the Executive Deans and Associate Deans.

4.3.2 Deans and Themes Relationship
The PRG saw little evidence of a functioning relationship between the Dean and the Theme structure during the evaluation. Given the structure of both i.e. faculties largely focused on specific disciplines, themes largely focused on broad concepts, a healthy tension could be expected and indeed beneficial. Notwithstanding this, the PRG considered the working relations between both structures (i.e. Deans and Themes) are less than optimal. Issues contributing to this are:
- a long standing dispute around the placement of the Theme Leaders outside the faculty structure which has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the Deans
- both Theme Leaders currently in post were appointed from outside the faculty structure as opposed to a previous Theme Leader who was appointed from within the faculty structure
- competition over research opportunities which the Deans structure consider should be outside the remit of the Theme Leaders. However, at least one of the Theme Leaders has a formal requirement to carry out research as part of his job specification
- a perception that the existence of the OTL in itself displaces resources from the faculties

4.3.3 Structures of the OTL
Through the adoption of pan-University themes as a strategic aim, DCU has signalled its intent to retain and strengthen capacity across innovation, adaptation and creativity. This initiative is without parallel in the University sector in Ireland and, as such, precedent is not available on which to base structures, roles, reporting relationships etc. Notwithstanding this absence of close comparators, some eight years after the commencement of the Themes initiative, there remains a vagueness regarding the purpose, role, remit and position of the OTL. This lack of clarity is evident throughout the University based on interviews conducted by the PRG.

This weak definition of working relations influences not only the operations of the OTL but also the activities of faculties. This lack of clarity is reflected in the OTL's involvement with a wide range of projects, which may well overlap with existing research priorities in the faculties.

4.3.4 Effectiveness of OTL
Difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining Theme Leaders have limited the effectiveness of the OTL. A consensus emerged in responses to the PRG that a Theme Leader was probably not required for all themes. Some faculties had commenced initiatives which emerged from an earlier consultation process without a Theme Leader. This trend of initiatives without a Theme Leader has supported those with negative perceptions to the OTL who argue that these initiatives demonstrate that the role of Theme Leader is redundant. An absence of uniformity of faculty engagement or operation among Theme Leaders has also contributed to the low level of understanding and buy-in to the concept of Theme Leaders among academic staff.

4.3.5 Purpose of OTL
The PRG considers that the OTL can best add value to DCU by removing any direct association with research projects and focusing entirely on facilitating and initiating new, fresh, collaborative ventures within the University in association with external stakeholders. To ensure that the resource of the OTL is maximised, potential

structural points of conflict should be minimised. The PRG considers that minimising competition for research opportunities will greatly improve relations between the OTL and academic staff.

4.3.6   Reporting arrangements: OTL and the Deputy President
OTL reports to the Deputy President. The PRG were informed that meetings occur with the OTL and the Deputy President on a frequency of six to eight weeks. However, minutes or agenda of these meetings were not provided. A formal known reporting structure between the OTL and the Deputy President would assist the process of integrating the Themes in DCU through the exchange of information and management oversight.

4.3.7   OTL and the Executive
The first Theme Leader, who subsequently left DCU to take up a position in New Zealand was a full member of the University Executive. Of the two theme leaders currently in post, one has observer status with regard to attendance at Executive while the other cannot attend. This diminution of involvement by the OTL in the Executive has not strengthened the capacity of the OTL to achieve the integration of the themes.

4.3.8   OTL and Heads of School
During the course of the evaluation, it emerged that a view exists among Associate Deans that Theme Leaders are ex-officio members of faculty-level committees and disappointment was expressed that the Theme Leaders had not attended meetings to date. However, it emerged that the Theme Leaders had not been made aware of their inclusion on such committees. It would be helpful to both the Dean structure and the Theme structure to agree the fora at which information will be shared and ideas debated. This agreement will help to manage expectations within both structures.

4.4   Functions and Activities

4.4.1   Defining Functions
As covered elsewhere, a recurrent topic in our discussions throughout the PGR visit was the 'lack of clarity' on the functions of the Theme Leaders and of their Office (OTL). Members of the Senior Management Group referred to the OTL as experimental, innovative, and unprecedented within the university sector. The OTL's SAR and the elaboration on that report in our meetings with the Theme Leaders referred repeatedly to inadequate job definitions and to the insufficient symbolic and material resources available to the OTL to carry out its functions as the Theme Leaders think appropriate.

For all of these reasons it is difficult to state the functions of the Office of Theme Leaders in a single, coherent paragraph. We observed the principal functions as having been defined in practice as follows:

- To promote interest in and awareness of the Academic Themes within DCU and beyond
- To form, or help form, groups to work on projects and initiatives on topics within the respective Theme domains – some being groups constituted within DCU, some also including people outside DCU, and some being principally external to DCU
- To facilitate or lead research and other project grant applications arising from such networking

- To build relations with relevant external stakeholders, raising DCU's profile in relation to selected topics with the Theme domains
- To 'Theme-proof' and contribute Theme-related content to teaching and other initiatives proposed for implementation within DCU, principally through membership of the Academic Strategy Committee

4.4.2 Interpretations of Theme Leader Role

We observed that the two Theme Leaders in place at the time of the visit carried out these functions with somewhat different emphases: one Theme Leader exercised his functions primarily as facilitator and promoter of research and other projects, mainly within DCU; the other Theme Leader acted more often as project leader, and concentrated on developing relations outside DCU. While two or more models of acting as Theme Leaders may be valid, the difference in approach may be reinforcing the widespread uncertainty within the DCU community about the roles and functions of the OTL.

4.4.3 OTL and Research Projects

The activities undertaken by OTL have included facilitation of, participation in, and leadership of groups, as outlined above, to undertake collaborative work and to pursue relevant funding opportunities. The SAR, in reference to the SDTI theme, listed 14 research grant applications to which the OTL had contributed. A research project manager in OTL has been principally engaged with supporting such grant applications. One successful application for a wind energy project was temporarily accommodated in the OTL at the time of the visit, though it was intended to re-house it in the Faculty of Science and Health. Decision is pending on another larger energy-related project which was supported by OTL, but which would be housed principally in the Faculty of Science and Health.

The SAR did not similarly list grant applications supported or led by the IISD Theme Leader, but the presence in OTL of research students and others working on projects to do with migration, interculturalism, community-based learning and other topics reflected how internal and external funding had been secured and allocated to Theme-related projects. Four OTL members receive studentships to support their PhD studies under the IISD theme; they all are also co-supervised from schools of the University, in the relevant disciplinary areas. All are funded from external sources, and since the PRG visit, two secured funding from IRCHSS.
(See Appendix 2 for full list of IISD funding bids).

4.4.4 Two Key Activities: Civic Engagement and Foresight

Under the IISD Theme, OTL has taken on two functions and activities that derive in large part from the 2006-8 Strategic Plan, *Leadership through Foresight*: developing and implementing a Civic Engagement Strategy, and co-leading the DCU Foresight Initiative. These two activities were presented, along with the Sustainability Initiative led by the SDTI Theme Leader (and the basis of the energy-related projects mentioned above, as well as other activities) as best defining the office's contribution in DCU and representing the strongest opportunities for the OTL's development.

Under the Civic Engagement Strategy, OTL has promoted or supported activities in community-based learning, the 'intercultural campus', arts and community regeneration, active citizenship, social inclusion, and in other related areas. The Peer Review Group was able to engage closely with only one of these strands, "DCU in the Community". We visited the newly opened facility in Ballymun for delivery of extra-mural and pre-university courses. We were impressed by the enthusiasm, competence and dedication of the staff associated with this project and by the courses on offer, through we noted that the menu of courses would need to be

expanded for the next academic year, requiring a consequent commitment from academic staff and from the Executive Deans. We noted the success of OTL in securing significant funding from Ballymun Regeneration Ltd to develop the facility and co-fund some salaries. We also heard of the breakdown of relations with a prospective funder, JUST (Jesuit University Support and Training), and the concern of DCU staff promoting access to university from educationally disadvantaged areas that the project may not be sustainable. However, this project appears to have been mainstreamed to a significant degree in DCU, through the Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation.

4.4.5   Other Activities
The OTL SAR listed other activities whose status we did not have time to explore. The SAR also contained extracts from the consultant's report provided to Atlantic Philanthropies in 2007; this included references to numerous activities, including "successful programs [such as] the DCU Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship, the Arts and Community Regeneration Projects, the Dublin-Liverpool Airbridge Project, the National Digital Research Centre, etc." The report provided no evidence of the claimed success of these activities, nor clarification of the OTL's role in them. The DCU Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship has closed, never having begun its proposed programme.

4.5   Stakeholder Perspectives

4.5.1   Online Survey Results
The SAR contains the results of an online survey whose existence was made known to DCU staff and to some people outside DCU. The results are difficult to interpret, partly because online surveys cannot reliably give a representative response, and partly because some questions were ambiguous. OTL notes, reasonably, that the perceptions of the office from those who have interacted with it are generally positive. However, the survey does also indicate low awareness of the office and scepticism, even antagonism, about it. The thrust of the comments in response to an open question, extracted in an appendix to the SAR, was confirmed in several contributors to discussions we held during the Peer Review Group visit.

4.5.2   Perceptions of Isolation
The SAR and the discussions we held with OTL staff indicated that office members were aware that communication with the wider DCU community was weak in some respects, and that scepticism about the Themes and the OTL was widespread. The SAR and the Theme Leaders, in further discussion, referred often to the office's 'isolation' or 'lack of support', and to the resistance from faculties to pursuit of an interdisciplinary programme across the university.

4.5.3   Perceptions of Redundancy
We had discussions with a group of senior staff, with the Director of Strategic Planning, with two researchers who had collaborated with OTL, and with a group of Associate Deans. We heard concerns repeatedly expressed that the Themes and the OTL were weakly defined at conceptual, structural and operational levels. Such observations were often accompanied by compliments to the individual Theme Leaders and expressions of sympathy on their 'invidious position' or 'being asked to work miracles'. Some academic staff stressed that interdisciplinary collaboration had been happening over many years at DCU, and did not necessarily need 'another layer of complication' to make it happen. Although it was generally, though not comprehensively, understood that OTL has been funded very largely through a grant from a philanthropic source, several staff referred to the office as a competitor for

university-level support in bidding for external funding, and for external funding itself. Indeed it was suggested that the Theme Leaders should be 'leading from behind'.

4.5.4   Connection with Faculties
The Associate Deans stated that it was their common view that the Themes and their respective Leaders should be assigned to the relevant faculties. They noted that the Deans and Themes meetings had discontinued, and they expressed concern that Theme Leaders had not taken up opportunities to contribute to faculty-level discussions. The shared view of Associate Deans and the senior staff group was that the Themes could not, and should not, survive in their present form.

4.5.5   Senior Management: Need for Reaffirmation and Review
Our meeting with the Senior Management Group (SMG) of the university confirmed that it was their intention that the Themes would be maintained as a central feature of the next university strategic plan, but that their number and their form might differ from what was set out originally or was even in place at present. The President, Deputy President, and two Vice-Presidents all reaffirmed the value of the Themes, their importance as reference points for various activities in the university, their impact on research and teaching and learning activities, and the recognition SMG considered was due to members of academic staff who engaged actively with Theme-related activities. They also acknowledged the need to reconsider how the Themes are managed and integrated, emphasizing the role of Theme Leaders as facilitators and leaders, but allowing that different Theme Leaders might work to somewhat different role-definitions and structures.

Responding to aspects of the OTL's SAR, the SMG affirmed that the opportunity existed for the Theme Leaders to promote their Themes actively, to see their influence in the university as based on persuasion rather than financial resources, and to take greater responsibility themselves for the communication of issues arising from their work.

4.5.6   External View
The only external stakeholder the Peer Review Group met was the consultant engaged on the DCU Foresight exercise which OTL co-led with the Office of the Vice-President for Research. The consultant stated the view that the continuing Foresight initiative would be appropriately located in OTL.

4.6   Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

4.6.1   Staffing
A diversity of staff comprises the OTL. There are two Theme Leaders - Professor Ronaldo Munck (Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development) and Dr Mike Hopkins (Science, Discovery and Technological Innovation), Personal Assistants, Administrators and Project Managers/Researchers associated with projects initiated by the TLs. Apart from Professor Munck, none has a permanent contract; most are on contracts renewable annually. Alignment of contracts with the availability of current external funding is not evident.

Originally 6 Theme Leaders were envisaged. The first appointment made was to the Business and Innovation theme however that appointee chose to leave DCU. A leader for this theme has been appointed to commence imminently on a part-time consultancy basis. Recruitment to the other themes has not been successful; it is likely that one further appointment will be attempted (Life Sciences & Health in

Society). Currently the role descriptions of Theme Leaders are not identical and are unclear even to post-holders.

The SAR states several times that procedures within the office are informal due to its small size. (It was interesting for the PRG to note the comment from senior managers that they had not intended OTL to grow so large). Nonetheless for effective operation every individual needs to be kept informed; to be listened to; to have regular, scheduled developmental appraisal and performance evaluation. And each staff member must know to expect these things as part of a management structure. During the SAR preparation phase staff meetings were held and plans made for ongoing communication however other actions have been ad hoc and patchy despite the fact that DCU has approved procedures for staff management.

4.6.2 Accommodation
The OTL is based on the ground floor of the L building immediately adjacent to DCU's Access Office and Student Recruitment Office. Space consists of private offices, a large open-plan office, a meeting room and an open area. The facilities are well-furbished, well-furnished and bright and airy. A down-side is that the entrance to the OTL area is located at the back of space occupied by Access/Student Recruitment that contains a lot of furniture, photocopiers, storage of boxes of brochures, prospectuses, display materials etc. There is also a display area for University literature and individuals come in to read it. Internal signage for the OTL is predominantly of the single printed page variety. The overall impression given on approaching the OTL is of non-permanence. Nonetheless the work spaces are good and adequate for the number of staff.

A project operated from within OTL is DCU in the Community so the involved staff spend some time off-campus at a recently-completed (February 2008) facility in Ballymun. The PRG visited that facility and found it to be of very good quality with security systems and procedures appropriate to its location. It provides an excellent environment for the types of educational programmes that are envisaged and that already have begun to be delivered. The project team are considering how the facility can be used as a means of communicating knowledge of the project's existence to DCU colleagues and students and the wider community. Already some events have been organised to this end and a formal launch event is scheduled for early summer 2008. To be effective in enabling a new constituency of people to engage with DCU, including enrolling as full-time students, the project will need to have the support of academic staff and managers for the development and delivery of courses in the facility, or linked to it. This has not yet happened nor is there an efficient model of engagement or deployment of resources.

4.6.3 Resources
Resourcing of the OTL is through grant funding of €2.6M from Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). These funds do not include significant project-specific resources. The original award from AP was contingent upon the University maintaining the OTL for 3 years post the externally-funded period. The AP funding is due to end in August 2008; originally it would have ended in 2007 however the non-appointment to several themes allowed extension to 2008. SMG informed the PRG that the University was committed to continue funding for a further three years. The SAR includes a recommendation that seed-corn funding be provided to the OTL to enable it to initiate projects. That would be one approach to encouraging academic staff engagement with theme-related projects however, to embed the academic themes within faculties and schools, senior managers would envisage the Theme Leaders bringing together inter-disciplinary groupings of relevant colleagues to work on attracting external funds.It is important to recognise that resources, most notably academic staff time,

are required in the development of project proposals or delivery of initial modules, in advance of the receipt of external funds. The appropriate funding source for such resources is unclear.

4.7 Overall Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns

4.7.1 Strengths
- The PRG heard widespread support for the concept of themed inter-disciplinarity in research and teaching. Academic staff saw this as a key part of the DCU brand and their pride was evident.
- The external funding for OTL has ensured that no other DCU unit has been financially disadvantaged by its existence since inception.
- The current Theme Leaders have strong personal track records in academia and beyond who are able to engage effectively with the external community and who recognise the validity of a needs-driven University agenda.
- The Theme Leader roles create freedom to engage at multiple levels within DCU and externally in order to effect change.
- The staff employed in other OTL posts have strong track records and/or evident potential for excellence. The PRG were very impressed by some outstanding individuals.
- The concept of Academic Themes has pervaded strategic plans, planning processes and associated documentation over the past 8 years.

4.7.2 Weaknesses
- There is a lack of clarity around the role of the OTL that causes uncertainty amongst OTL staff and their internal partners.
- The OTL have not secured a partnership with academic colleagues, particularly Deans and Associate Deans.
- There is little effective formal, operational contact between faculties/schools/ research centres and the OTL.
- There is a perception that the Theme Leaders are competing with academic staff for internal and external resources; many staff commented that if OTL did not exist the current structures would enable pursuit of the themes.
- The current Theme Leaders are engaged in research and community projects as individual academics outside the Faculty structure which is a point of conflict.
- The concept of Academic Themes has pervaded strategic plans, planning processes and associated documentation over 8 years – without delivering obvious benefit.

4.7.3 Opportunities
- The flexible roles of Theme Leaders, relatively unencumbered by major administrative or teaching workloads, can reduce the lead-time for responding to education and research needs emerging within the wider community.
- The OTL can lead Foresight to ensure that the University recognises when there is a need for it to respond to change.
- The career prospects of academic colleagues who engage in OTL initiated projects can be enhanced, e.g. by creating a novel niche of enquiry or education in which DCU staff are then seen as leaders.
- The educational experience of DCU students can be enhanced by engaging in inter-disciplinary approaches to problem-solving in the broader community during taught programmes or research projects initiated by OTL.

- More external funding can be attracted to projects initiated by OTL when it demonstrates that DCU can achieve objectives more effectively than traditional, discipline-based institutions.
- More external support can be attracted, e.g. from business, the community and philanthropy, when engagement with the OTL helps them to achieve their own organisational goals.

4.7.4 Concerns
- Elevated expectations amongst the external community that, if not met, will potentially damage the reputation of DCU.
  - If the current uncertainties around the future and role of the OTL are not addressed through action, including communication, by senior management the internal community will become more sceptical of top-down initiatives.
- If the current uncertainties around staffing are not addressed through action, including formal communication, by senior management and by Theme Leaders, the motivation and effectiveness of OTL staff will decline.

5 Recommendations for Improvement

No.	Recommendation	Priority	Addressee
1	The University should confirm the funding arrangements post Atlantic Philanthropy funding, for the OTL to the OTL and to the wider University community immediately	P1	U
2	A plan should be agreed between the OTL and University Executive setting out objectives, targets and output measurements from Autumn 2008 to the end of the funding period (i.e. 3 years). This agreed plan to be signed off by end of June 2008. As part of agreeing the plan: - the structures for the OTL should be agreed and signed off by all of the Deans. - the Human Resource requirement for the OTL should be formalised for the funding period (i.e. 3 years post Autumn 2008) by the Deputy President with regard to Theme Leaders and by the OTL with regard to other Human Resources by end of July 2008. - a statement of role definition of OTL staff should be signed off. This role should clearly define the catalyst, persuasion, facilitating role of the OTL. The Deans and Themes committee meetings should be reconvened, commencing immediately, with the initial business of items	P1	U, OTL

	set out above.		
3	From the agreed plan, OTL to devise a work programme with specific deliverables to be agreed with University Executive and communicated to OTL staff. A business item for future Deans and Themes meetings (recommendation 4) will be indicators of progress on key deliverables.	P1	U, OTL
4	OVPR to ensure that research projects facilitated / initiated by OTL are integrated into the research structure. OVPLI to ensure that teaching based projects including community based projects, be absorbed into the schools, and faculties as appropriate.	P2	U, OTL
5	Formalised meetings should be introduced between the OTL and the Deputy President.	P1	U, OTL
6	Monthly staff meetings should be held with OTL staff, notwithstanding that it may not be possible for all staff to attend all meetings. A more formal performance management system should be introduced for all staff.	P2	OTL

- o P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.
- o P2: A recommendation that is important, but can (or perhaps must) be addressed on a more extended time scale.
- o 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.

- o OTL: Action required by Unit
- o U: Action required by University Executive/Senior Management

OTL Staffing, Assignment and Contract Status

OTL Staff, Assignment and Contract Status

Name	Title	Assigned	Project Description/Title	With OTL Since	Status	Contract	Funding Body
Ms. Eva Carroll	P.A.	Office	N/A	2004	F/T	12 mth	OTL
Ms.Deirdre Eustace	Researcher	Project	Cultural Needs	2007	P/T	3-4 mth	Fingal County Council
Ms. Arlene Flynn	Community-Based Learning Coordinator	Project	Community-Based Learning / Civic Engagement	2007	F/T	9 mth	Government Strategic Innovation Fund
Ms. Catríona Fitzgerald	Administrative Assistant	Project	Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building	2008	P/T	36 mth	Irish Aid
Ms. Niamh Gaynor	Project Manager	Project	Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building	2008	F/T	36 mth	Irish Aid
Dr. Mike Hopkins	Theme Leader (SDTI)	Office	N/A	2005	F/T	36 mth	OTL
Ms. Mary Hyland	PhD Candidate	Project	Research into Irish Trade Union Movement and Migration	2007	F/T	36 mth Studentship	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Dr. Peter Iordanov	Researcher	Project	VEWER - Development of a Wind Resource Assessment Software Tool	2008	F/T	12 mth (Jan 2009)	National Digital Research Centre
Ms. Gloria Macri	Project Manager/PhD Candidate	Project	Migration and Integration Programme, 'Romanians in Ireland - Ethnic minorities, media and transnational identities'	2005	F/T	12 mth - Research studentship	OTL / Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences
Ms. Natalja Matease	Personal Assistant	Office	N/A	2006	P/T	12 mth (March 2009)	OTL

Mr. Niall McMahon	Research Officer (Provisional)	Office	N/A	2007	F/T	12 mth (March 2009)	OTL
Ms. Cathy McLoughlin	Administrative Assistant	Project	DCU in the Community	2008	P/T	-	Ballymun Regeneration Ltd.
Ms. Aoileann Ní Mhurchú	Managing Editor/PhD Candidate	Project	Migration and Integration Programme	2007	F/T	12 mth - Research studentship	OTL / Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences
Ms. Veronica Mkilanya	PG Researcher	Project	-	2008	F/T	Research studentship	Irish Aid
Prof. Ronaldo Munck	Theme Leader (IISD)	Office	N/A	2004	F/T	Permanent	OTL
Ms. Catherine Murray	Projects Manager, Civic Engagment	Project/Office	DCU in the Community	2006	F/T	12 mth (August 2008)	OTL / Co-Funded Ballymun Regeneration Ltd.
Ms. Nora Shovelin	Researcher	Project	Science Shop (NewCom project - needs analysis of the mental health requirements of members of new communities)	2005	P/T	12 mth	Science Shop
Ms. Elizabeth Yuko	Researcher/PhD Candidate	Project	Racial discrimination in the workplace	2007	F/T	24 mth	Philip Lynch Inc.

List of IISD Funding Bids 2005 - 2007

IISD Funding Bids 2005-07

Funder	Project	Amount	Result
POBAL	International Students	€35,000	Successful
Integrating Ireland	International Students	€35,000	Successful
Dublin City Council	Skills Training	€20,000	Unsuccessful
Dublin Region	North/South relations	€35,000	Unsuccessful
Ballymun Regeneration Ltd	DCU in the Community	€80,000 setup €50,000 per annum	Successful
Ballymun Regeneration Ltd	Arts in the Community	€25,000	Successful
Fingal County Council	Migrants and Heritage	€25,000	Successful
Fingal County Council	Migrants and Culture	€10,000	Successful
Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Migration Policy Studentship	€60,000	Successful
Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Migrants and Equality Project	€25,000	Successful
EU Development & Security	Trafficking for forced labour	€45,000	Successful
Financial Regulator	Migrant remittances	€25,000	Successful
EU Science and Society	CAIRDE project	€65,000	Successful
EU Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR Project	€50,000	Sucessful
McDonald's Corporation	Diversity Project	€75,000	Successful
Philip Lynch Ltd	Diversity Project	€50,000	Successful
Enterprise Ireland	FP6 Application	€10,000	Successful
FP6 (EU)	EUROMIX project	€1,500,000	Shortlisted
FP6 (EU)	MIGRATION project	€750,000	Unsuccessful
FP7 (EU)	Migration project	€1,500,000	Submitted
HEA / Irish Aid	Research Capacity Building Project	€1,500,000	Successful
IRCHSS	Migration Project	€75,000	Unsuccessful
IRCHSS	Migration Network	€15,000	Unsuccessful
IRCHSS	2 Postgraduate Studentships	€80,000	Successful