

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement  
Programme for Administrative Units  
2003-2004



Peer Review Group Report  
for  
Student Affairs

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(Chair)

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## Introduction

This Quality review has been conducted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and which 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.
4. The Unit produces a response to the various issues and findings of the SAR and PRG Reports.
5. The PRG Report and the Unit response are then considered at a meeting of the relevant Senior Management of the University (Deputy President, Registrar, Vice-President for Research etc.) who address recommendations in the Peer Review Group Report, that fall outside the control of the Unit or that require additional resources. Arising from this meeting, Unit and University based action plans are approved. Together, these are termed the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
6. A summary of the Quality Review is sent to the Governing Authority of the University, who may approve publication in a manner that they see fit. Following the approval of the summary report by the Governing Authority, it is published on the University website. The full text of the Peer Review Group Report is also published on the Quality Promotion Unit website.

## **1. Profile of the Unit**

### Location of the Unit

The main Student Affairs building is the Pavilion Building, adjacent to the main student restaurant with easy wheelchair access to all offices and automatic doors leading to the main Student Affairs reception area.

Due to the services provided by Student Affairs, the personnel within Student Affairs require separate rooms for confidential counselling and meetings. Within the Pavilion Building is the Careers & Appointments Service – one main office and four offices for Careers Advisors. The offices of the Student Financial Assistance Administrator and the First Year Student Support Facilitator are also located in the Pavilion, as is the office of the Director of Student Affairs. All the Counsellors are located in the Pavilion Building, two on the ground floor and one on the first floor. The appointments service for Counselling, Financial Assistance, First Year Support and the Office of the Director is located in the main Student Affairs reception area. Appointments for the Careers Service are made through the main Careers office located in the Pavilion Building.

Due to space restrictions and the need for individual offices, it is impossible for the services within Student Affairs to be all located in the same building. The Access Service is located in the Henry Grattan Building where the offices of the secretary, two Project Officers, the Access Officer and the Mature Student Officer are located.

The Health Service is also located in the Henry Grattan building in the recently expanded Health Centre.

The Sport and Recreation Service is located in the Sports Complex. In addition to the indoor facilities, the service has seven grass pitches and an Astro turf pitch. A swimming pool is opening in May 2004.

The Chaplaincy Service is located in the Inter-Faith Centre where there are individual offices for the chaplains, along with a meeting room, kitchen, library, quiet room and room for Inter-faith services.

The Student Activities Officer is located adjacent to the club and societies area in the HUB to allow easy liaison with the Students' Union, Clubs and Societies Officers and students.

A proposal has been made for the development of the upper level of the Pavilion to address the lack of office space and to allow the services of Student Affairs to be housed in the same building (with the exception of the Chaplaincy Service and the Sport and Recreation Service). The development of the upper level would enable the Health Centre and the Access Service to return to purpose-built accommodation with its own reception area, while freeing up office space in the Henry Grattan building and the Pavilion.

## Staff

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>
Professor	Director of Student Affairs
Secretary Grade II	Secretarial support for Student Affairs
Administrative Assistant Grade IV	General administration and financial assistance administration
Administrator	Full-time nurse
Lecturer	First Year Student Support Facilitator
Lecturer Admin II	Head of Counselling Service
Administrator	Student Counsellor
Administrator	Student Counsellor
Lecturer Admin II	Head of Careers and Appointments Service
Administrator	Careers Advisor
Administrator	Careers Advisor with responsibility primarily for Access, Mature and Refugee students
Administrator	Careers Advisor with responsibility primarily for students with disabilities
Secretary Grade II	Secretary to the Careers and Appointments Service
Secretary Grade II	Secretary to the Careers and Appointments Service
Secretary Grade II	Secretary to Health Centre
Administrator Grade VI	Head of Access Service
Administrative Assistant Grade IV	Project Officer for the Access Service
Administrative Assistant Grade IV	Project Officer for the Access Service
Administrative Assistant Grade IV	Mature Student Project Officer for the Access Service
Secretary Grade III	Secretary for the Access Service
Chaplain	Roman Catholic Chaplain
Chaplain	Roman Catholic Chaplain
Administrator	Overall management of Sport and Recreation Service
Administrative Assistant Grade IV	Facility Management in Sport and Recreation Service
Receptionist	Receptionist in Sports Complex
Gym Instructor	Gym Instructor in Sports Complex
Secretary Grade II	Receptionist in Sports Complex
Sports Coordinator	Fitness Supervision in Sports Complex
Sports Complex Attendant	Sports Complex Attendant
Fitness Supervisor	Programme Developer in Sport and Recreation Service
Administrator Grade V	Sports Development Officer for students with a disability

## Mission Statement

Student Affairs, at DCU, as a team of professionals, is committed to promoting the holistic development, education and empowerment of students and to engaging in a proactive and integrated manner with those who affect this process, acting as an agent of change at individual, structural and policy level.

Within this mission we have a specific mandate to identify and cater for the personal, social, cultural, recreational, spiritual and welfare needs of the students by means of appropriate policies, services and facilities. In addition to our primary clients, we also have a mission to staff and to many other internal and external groups. In order to achieve this mission we recognise the importance of nurturing our own resources by means of mutual support, teamwork and professional development.

Student Affairs consists of the following services: Counselling Service, Careers and Appointments Service, Health Service, Sport and Recreation Service, Access Service, Chaplaincy Service, Student Activities Officer, First Year Student Support Facilitator, Student Financial Assistance Service and Student Facilities.

Included in the role of Student Affairs as well as providing services to students within DCU is to develop the student policy of DCU. Because of its integrated nature and broad scope (including facilities and student policy), the Student Affairs unit in DCU differs from other Student Services departments in other Irish universities.

In addition, Student Affairs is closely related to the Academic Departments within DCU in their role of having responsibility for the Personal Tutor System, and developing Study Skills Programmes and Student Empowerment Programmes. Staff within Student Affairs is also active in research and presenting papers at conferences (both internationally and in Ireland).

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

### The Co-ordinating Committee

The following list comprises of all members of the Unit's co-ordinating committee. The committee comprised of individuals from the various services and grades within the unit. As can be seen from the list there was some staff changes in the department which impacted on the final composition of the committee.

Barry Kehoe - Director  
Catherine Roche - Administrative Assistant  
Gillian Smyth - Grade II Secretary  
Muireann Ní Duigneáin - Head of Careers and Appointments Service  
Martina Crehan - First Year Student Support Facilitator  
Sinéad Mahon (Currently on sick leave from the University)  
Ruán Kennedy - Counsellor  
Colette Keogh - Grade III Secretary  
Access Officer (Meave O'Byrne until Dec. 03, Ita Tobin took up post in Jan. 04)  
Student Activities Officer (Ian Russell left in Oct. 03, Yvonne O'Connor took up post in Feb 04)  
John O'Carroll - Sport and Recreation Officer  
Joanne Richards - Project Office – Access Service  
Agostino Sogaro - Chaplain

### Methodology Adopted

From February 2003, meetings were held monthly and from October 2003 meetings were held weekly until the Christmas break. There are meetings scheduled from the submission of the report to the actual review, taking place at the end of February 2004.

The committee consists of a member from each service within Student Affairs and a member from each grade within the unit. Members of the committee collected information about their service to submit for the self-assessment report. It was the responsibility of each committee member to submit information for the appendices including the annual reports and the service strategic plans. Each service also undertook their own client survey and all results were submitted to the Quality Liaison

Officer for inclusion. It was the responsibility of the Quality Liaison Officer to liaise with other departments, to oversee the overall surveys and to write the actual report. Outside members of University staff were invited to the committee meetings.

All information recorded at the committee meetings were saved onto the Unit's shared drive (L drive) for the entire Unit to see. It was also the responsibility of each committee member to communicate information to their colleagues whom they represented on the committee. Staff members were also welcomed to address the committee and to contact the Quality Liaison Officer for any reason.

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

#### Overall Comments on the Visit

The interaction with all concerned in the process indicated that the people working in all areas in the unit were committed and participated fully in the peer review process. Each area was represented actively and the panel was given the opportunity to discuss quality issues with all members in a climate that was both open and constructive. The willingness to provide positive input and to critically analyse the issues in the area have added to the utility and impact of the review process.

It was clear to panel members that there is a strong sense of pride and commitment within the unit. Scheduling of meetings during the peer review visit was somewhat problematic. The panel felt that sufficient time may not have been available to explore all issues adequately. The PRG would like to thank Gillian Smyth in particular, who facilitated changes and updates to schedules during the visit and liaised on a continuous basis with panel and university. When the PRG group reflected on its own effectiveness, it identified that the initial meeting between the PRG and the unit was not as productive as it could have been. This was due to the fact that review group had not been able to spend adequate time orientating itself towards its task as a group prior to the meeting. The group felt that this initial phase of the process could have been improved if the PRG had more time for orientation at the beginning of the visit and the opportunity to meet the staff of student affairs in an informal context

#### Site Visit Programme

##### Day 1 (Wednesday 25 February 2004)

- Meeting with members of the Peer Review Group. This was a briefing by the Director of Quality Promotion.
- Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with Unit Quality Committee
- Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Director of Student Affairs and Unit Quality Co-ordinating Committee.

##### Day 2 (Thursday 26 February 2004)

- The Peer review group met with the members of each of the individual service groups.
- Discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion
- Meeting with the representative selections of the Students and other stakeholders.
  - Student groups
  - Academic Staff

- Graduates
- Employers

#### Day 3 (Friday 27 February 2004)

- Peer Review Group met with the University Senior Management Group.
- Met with individual staff members of the unit
- Tour of the Unit facilities and accommodation
- Prepared 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of Final Report
- Presented the findings to all staff of the unit in a Powerpoint presentation.

#### Overview of the Site Visit

In general the PRG felt that the site visit was well organised and that the Student Affairs Unit made every effort to make themselves and all relevant documentation available to the PRG. The PRG felt that a more qualitative insight into the day to day life of individuals in the Student Affairs unit, would have further enhanced the perspectives and information gained. Inevitable time constraints made this impossible.

As already indicated the PRG felt there was room for improvement in the first meeting between the PRG and the Unit. In some ways this initial meeting was more formal than it should have been, and would have been more effective as a supportive, introductory meeting between the panel and the student affairs unit.

The expectation of the review process on the part of the staff of the Unit did not appear to be consistent with the purpose of the review process as formally set out. There was a very strong focus on personnel issues and a comparatively weak consideration of other issues. This lack of balance in approach was evident in the self assessment report as well as in the meetings with the individual staff members. This was a source of some concern to the PRG who felt that individual resource based issues, while an important dimension of any quality review should have been balanced more effectively with equal identification of how current activities could also be enhanced.

While the PRG can make recommendations which should reflect best practice it is not always possible to address the individual needs of all members of staff working within the unit under review. When talking to the service users, it became evident early on in the process that reference was made to the same specific units in student affairs and not to Student Affairs as a whole.

Interactions with service users indicated that many of them were not aware of the full range and diverse nature of the services available.

#### Methodology

As there was a very tight timetable to adhere to particularly on day 2 of the visit, the PRG decided to work as two groups. The groups comprised  
Group 1: Sarah Moore, Jurgen Burzlaff, Keith Cooper  
Group 2: Paul Smith, Matthew Doran.

The timetable for the morning was as follows, the full PRG met with the Director of the services. Then,

Group 1 met with Access Services, Careers, Counselling, First year Student Support Facilitator, Student Activities Officer.

Group 2 met with Chaplains, Sports and Recreation, Health Centre, Student Financial Assistance.

Even with this breakdown, time management continued to be a difficulty. The average time allotted to each meeting was approximately 25 minutes. During the afternoon sessions the full PRG were present at all meetings. On day 3 the PRG were present at all sessions. As the PRG were working as two separate units during day two it was agreed that in all sessions the PRG would use a standard template for questions.

The questions used in the PRG template were:

1. What issues or resourcing would you like to see the University or HEA deal with in order to help Student Affairs achieve its mission more successfully?
2. What would you like to see your line manager do?
3. What could you do?
4. Elicit views about the document itself.
5. How could boundaries be established around services, in ways that help to fulfil the units Strategy?
6. What are your views of self-monitoring activities – what are the existing ones and consider an evaluation or performance indicators?
7. What in your view is the function of Student Affairs?
8. What will the impact be on the future changes in student demographics?

While the questions outlined were used to act as a template not all questions were used in every session. Rather they acted as a guide to the ensuing discussions.

#### Review Group's view of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG felt that the assessment was significantly descriptive, providing a plentiful supply of information. The report also provided the PRG with a clear understanding of the role and functions of each of the separate services. The PRG felt that the document did not adequately highlight the achievements of the unit and that this was a missed opportunity for some positive messages to be sent to the staff within the unit and to the University as a whole. The report didn't reflect the enthusiasm that the PRG experienced during the site visit. As a result of not picking up on the unit's achievements there was a somewhat unbalanced focus on deficiencies relating to resources/ grading and facilities in the report.

The PRG felt that the report directed its attention largely to sub elements of the Unit, and as a consequence there was a reduced sense of the Unit as an integrated operational whole. The Strategic Plan for the Unit mirrored this approach. Some services within the Unit had strong well structured strategic plans, while in contrast there was little sense of a Strategic Plan for the Unit as a whole was fragmented and failed to give a sense of the unit as a whole. There were significant issues to do with the operation of the unit, which emerged during the visit that did not appear in the report.

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



### Background and Context

In the recent past there have been changes in the portfolio of service offering. These have emerged both in terms of reductions (Accommodation, Schools Liaison / Student Recruitment and Disability) and increases in service offerings. The unit's relationship to the University has changed but there has been no formal communication from the senior management of the University to outline how this will impact on the unit's role in the University. There is an evident dearth of active direction from the Senior Management of the University as to what it expected of the Unit. This is reflected in many changes in the portfolio of services in the Unit in recent years without an apparent stated strategic basis for these changes. As a consequence there is uncertainty in the Unit about its future shape, purpose and strategic focus. There have been changes of key stakeholders of the service offering particularly in areas such as the sports and recreation where the stakeholders are no longer restricted to members of the University community. The recent University organisational change with the role of the VPLI/Registrar having responsibility for the unit was seen as a potentially very positive step that could significantly enhance the structural and processual dynamics of Student Affairs – In particular by improving the sense of connection between Student Affairs and the University's Senior Management

Changes in the institutional style of management have impacted on the unit. The PRG also got a sense that many members of student affairs look at the past as 'the good old days' and feel a sense that aspects of the service along with its climate and culture have been lost as a result of continued organisational growth and change. The PRG also noted that as the University has grown the influence of the Unit at a University level seems to have decreased, this may have had a negative impact on Student Affairs sense of status and the extent to which it feels it is 'recognised' by the University.

The Unit also has to deal with managing one of the tensions traditionally faced by Student Affairs departments; between being a developmental service and a remedial or problem-based one. As resources become more restricted and the pressures and stressors faced by student populations increase, it becomes more difficult to deliver on the developmental agenda. There may be an increased expectation on the part of teaching staff and administrative colleagues that Student Affairs will 'mop up' problems. Whilst these changed expectations are understandable, the University should look carefully at the ways in which the developmental agenda can contribute to its educational objectives – e.g. at the way in which activities like the Counselling Service's Student Empowerment Programme helps students to acquire those personal qualities and attributes that are increasingly valued in the workplace

An area that has created a great deal of concern to staff in the unit is continuing restrictions and uncertainty around funding and resourcing of specific services and the unit in general. While the PRG recognised the concerns that relate to specific commercialisation of services, the PRG feels the tension around this issue needs to be worked through between Student Affairs and the University senior management team. While it must be recognised that the commercialisation process is necessary within the University Sector, this process needs more buy-in as well as more active empowerment of and ownership by the Student Affairs unit. In particular, the position of the Sports and Recreation Service in the Student Affairs portfolio needs to be clarified.

Following the meetings with the various groups in the Student Affairs unit the group felt that within the team, there were great ideas which should be used to contribute to any future commercialisation framework. In order to encourage such contributions there needs to be an appropriately negotiated benefit structure to incentivise the Student Affairs team for any additional income generation undertaken by the unit. The PRG felt that there is little evidence to support the argument that any benchmarking has taken place in regard to the commercialised options being undertaken.

The current feedback mechanisms used to assess the level of use of services and/or the customer opinion, appear not to work as evidenced by the low numbers responding to surveys. The PRG feel that a more robust, coherent and representative performance measurement system needs to be designed and implemented. Perhaps this could be based on one or more of the standards of service or quality assurance mechanisms that have been – or are being – developed in the USA and UK by some of the professions that are included in the Unit.

The PRG welcome the acknowledgement by Senior Management that changes that have occurred have made the staff uncertain about the role of Student Affairs. Given the new positioning of Student Affairs within the portfolio of the Vice President of Learning Innovation / Registrar, this provides a timely opportunity to clarify the role and function of the unit.

#### Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

The PRG appreciated the level of documentation and critical analysis provided by the unit for this visit. However the PRG also felt 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. It also became very obvious that despite the impressive level of commitment by staff, there are clear signs that low morale is an issue in at least some parts of the unit.

An area where the PRG observed that the unit had invested a huge amount of energy was its clear commitment to service to the individual student. Students were strong in their recognition of this commitment and stated that they valued it highly. And students looked to and used the Unit as the provider of a safety net in instances of difficult experiences at the University. Part of the role that the Unit had defined for itself was clearly an advocacy one on behalf of students.

Generally the accommodation is well maintained, appropriate and student focused, though the PRG shares the anxieties about the limitations associated with waiting areas and excessive demand on certain spaces. The PRG shares concerns about inadequate staffing but was also concerned about the way in which evidence is presented to make legitimate cases.

The PRG sees significant opportunities for the unit if it develops its use of information and communication technology (ICT) to alleviate some of the resource related pressures that currently prevail. Some areas in the unit (particularly careers) have successfully begun to exploit the technologies in appropriate and creative ways and the PRG feels that these orientations could be developed more synergistically across the whole unit. However, a 'health warning' should be added in the observation that ICT based approaches to support and guidance should become *additional* forms of delivery rather than *alternative* forms of delivery.

Many of the individual units within student affairs have identified that staff members need to be re-graded and that many people are doing work and involved in activities that are not reflected in their current grading levels. The PRG feels that more work

needs to be done within student affairs to develop standardised, legitimised cases for re-grading of staff. Effective interaction with the HR department to establish accurate indicators and criteria for re-grading, to identify areas of particular priorities and to manage expectations effectively and appropriately, would contribute to progress in this area.

The feedback session from students also indicated that there is awareness amongst students of 'the system working under strained resources'. The Health Centre emerged as particularly problematic. The issue of patient load management needs to be reviewed. The purpose of any review of the Health Centre should be to ensure that the optimum service is delivered. The PRG found that the purpose of the health centre and the expectations of its level of service provision seem to differ significantly across the university. Students have a certain expectation which does not match with the established function and level of service that the Health Centre is committed to providing. The PRG welcomed the University senior management's preparedness to undertake, a more in-depth review of resourcing in Student Affairs.

#### Planning and Resource Management

The PRG felt that there were particular concerns which needed to be addressed relating to the future of targeted initiatives. As some of the roles currently being carried out by Student Affairs are funded by this mechanism, there is particular disquiet and uncertainty about over the future of these services and the individual staff members currently carrying out these roles.

While many of the sub units within Student Affairs have very clear and detailed plans of action, there is a lack of unified, integrated plans for the entity as a whole. There also appears to be a lack of planning and adequate direction from University senior management for the unit, which may be partly a result of structural changes. The existence of a Heads and Officers Group (HOG) is a very positive structural feature characterised by great potential that the PRG feels is currently being underutilised. Reference has already been made to the potential of the Unit's new link to University senior management to improve the connection *between* the Unit and overall University strategy. It is the PRG's view that the HOG has a similar potential to improve connectedness *within* the Unit.

There has been a proliferation of innovative ideas in some areas, a dynamic that reflects the commitment and creativity of people within Student Affairs. However, given the current strain on the system, these innovations may have implications for resource management and unless appropriately resourced, could interfere with the capacity of the service to meet its core objectives.

The PRG noted the potential of a faculty review process to inform decisions about the role of Student Affairs in the context of the University Strategy. Each unit on its own may risk having low visibility. This endorses the importance of a strong championing role within the unit. The PRG is encouraged that Student Affairs is more likely to be represented effectively at the strategic apex of the university now that the new VPLI/Registrar role has been established and is in place. In framing the relationship between the work of Student Affairs and University Strategy, consideration should be given to those aspects of the Unit's work that may have an indirect but positive effect on University revenue, e.g. improving student retention rates, supporting the tensions and responding to the needs created by a more heterogeneous and diverse student population together with the positive impact on recruitment of home and international students that can be achieved by good standards of customer care; much international student recruitment comes about by 'word of mouth.'

The PRG also noted the President's recognition that performance indicators that evaluate some aspects of the student experience are not exclusively dependant on the activities being undertaken by Student Affairs. The PRG also felt that it is imperative that this recognition needs to be built into any future performance review processes of the Unit

#### Functions, Activities and Processes

The PRG could see that within the Unit there was clarity of individual service objectives with the exception of the Health Centre.

The highly centralised structure of decision making both at Unit level and at University senior management level appeared to lead to a 'bottleneck' issue associated with the way in which decisions and information are communicated through the Director of the unit. This issue became a recurring theme in many of the group meetings. The PRG noted that issues relating to vertical and horizontal communication contributed to this lack of clarity of unit objectives and strategic direction.

The PRG has a concern that some initiatives seemed to be driven – perhaps too much on occasion - by anxiety about obtaining recognition and maintaining status. For example, there may be a question about the appropriateness of the extent of the priority for research sought by the Counselling Service. Perhaps the University needs to take other steps to ensure that the core casework of Counsellors is experienced as being valued and recognised. The Counselling Service is not the only section of the Unit where promotion of new activities runs the risk of further overwhelming facilities that are perceived as already under-resourced.

The PRG also noted the unequal and inconsistent levels of awareness across the student and faculty population about services on offer from Student Affairs. That being said, both populations were quick to qualify this view by stating that their particular level of awareness of some activities and lack of awareness of others was based on "their need to know". For example, employer representatives and students had a keen awareness of the role of the Careers Service. And they were strong in their recognition of the high quality of the service.

Student and faculty representatives pointed to the quality of the Access Service in supporting students.

A student representative who had experience of another University based on the European mainland emphasised the superior quality of the Student Affairs service in DCU as compared to his experience in the other institution.

The PRG noted that the Careers Section of the Unit had recourse to branding as a mechanism for increasing the awareness levels of its services. It recommended the use of this approach as an awareness- enhancing vehicle for the Unit as a whole.

Student Affairs could brand itself much more effectively as an entity that supports the learner experience in a whole range of different but integrated ways. It is clear that many of the publications and flyers generated by the Unit are not clearly identified with Student Affairs. This could be easily addressed by developing a common logo or brand, without undermining the uniqueness or contribution of each separate sub-unit. The induction process for first years, again a highly visible and important activity was not clearly associated with Student Affairs.

The PRG noted the unique role of the Unit in organising academic and Student Affairs Orientation for First Year Students. The PRG are keen to acknowledge the Student Handbook produced by the Unit as an example of good practice in connection with Student Orientation

The PRG highlighted its concern relating to the wide span of responsibility of the Director of unit leading to a perceived dilution of focus on management of the Unit; much of his day to day work, e.g. in liaison with the Students' Union or duties related to the companies responsible for facilities management, do not impact directly on the management of staff and functions of Student Affairs.

The PRG was greatly encouraged by particular examples of best practice as evidenced in e.g. the Careers and Counsellor Functions of the unit.

PRG noted that there appears to be an absence of generic advice services for students on matters such as finance and tenancy agreements. Similarly, there does not appear to be a University complaints procedure in place. Both may be key elements of a future that is likely to see students having a stronger sense of themselves as customers and should be included within any strategic view of the role of Student Affairs.

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

### **Staffing, Accommodation and Resources**

#### *Strengths*

- Dedicated, professional staff
- Strong sense of 'team' within functional areas of Unit
- Enthusiasm of recruits to some of Unit's more recently established functions
- Relatively central physical location and sense of 'One Stop Shop'
- Fact that services are under resourced is acknowledged and understood by the student body and colleagues in academic and service departments

#### *Weaknesses*

- Low staff morale
- Insufficient staff resources in some critical areas
- Limited/Inappropriate physical space for some core services
- Undeveloped Management Information System for the Unit (MIS)
- Uncertainty of continued funding for some core services

#### *Opportunities*

- Potential of HOG to improve internal communication within Unit
- Potential to attract added funding from outside the University under various national and possibly international schemes.

#### *Concerns*

- Loss of staff because of re-grading and resourcing issues
- Staff 'burn-out'
- Some core services cease to exist because of cessation of external funding

### **Planning and Resource Management**

### *Strengths*

- Respect based on Unit's contribution to the foundation and growth of the University

### *Weaknesses*

- Weak links to University Strategic Planning Process
- Unwieldy, unfocused span of responsibility of Unit's Director

### *Opportunities*

- New Senior Management Structure can facilitate greater integration of Unit in Strategic Planning process of the University

### *Concerns*

- Some of Unit's functions may not be seen by the University as part of its core business
- Unit's attempts to 'prove its value' through more diverse range of activities may lead to loss of focus and/or being overwhelmed by demand

## **Functions, Activities and Processes**

### *Strengths*

- Good focus on and awareness of relationship between student development and key institutional objective of enhancing graduate employability

### *Weaknesses*

- 'Patchy' contact with academic departments
- Loss of sense of single unifying ethos for the Unit because of commercial focus of Sport and Recreation
- Lack of understanding within the University of the scope and detail of the Department's work

### *Opportunities*

- Potential of Unit to contribute to key institutional objectives such as improving student retention and enhancing graduate employability
- Potential of Unit to contribute to meeting the needs/demands of more diverse student population
- Increasing importance of 'customer care' in higher education in Europe and anglophone countries
- Focus on student personal growth and development functions, e.g. Disability Service, and transfer facilities management functions to other areas of the University e.g. Sports and Recreation.
- Develop a clearer 'brand' for the Unit
- Develop more ICT based approaches to support and guidance
- Develop generic advice service focusing on 'lower key' student info/advice needs e.g. finance, tenancy agreements

### *Concerns*

- Risk of fragmentation due to the breadth of the Unit's portfolio.
- Risk of marginalisation as the University shifts its focus to income generation.

## **6. Recommendations for Improvement**

Recommendations that are within the remit of the Unit to implement.

- Overall, communication needs to be improved with emphasis on the removal of the 'bottleneck' system of vertical communication that currently prevails.
- The PRG felt that the unit needs to work on ensuring that the functions of Student Affairs need to be more visible within the overall University system, e.g. by branding Student Affairs materials and outputs.
- Student Affairs should prioritise its activities in line with its role and function as agreed with the senior management of the university.
- The Heads and Officers Group currently in operation in the unit needs to be more active and more utilized, particularly with respect to enhancing communication within and beyond the Student Affairs unit.
- The unit needs to ensure that all services work more closely together through this forum and to utilise potential synergies that may exist between services within the unit, between the Unit and academic departments and through relationships that exist between services and external agencies.
- The University should appropriately include the Student Affairs expertise in the relevant University committee structures.
- There is a continuous need to monitor, and develop the management and leadership skills of the key people in the unit.
- Individual members of the unit need to find strategic ways to set boundaries on their activities and not to spread them too thinly.
- Review processes needs to be embedded more actively and consistently into the ongoing activities of the unit
- The creation of generic advice services for students on matters such as finance and tenancy agreements.
- Put a complaints procedure in place.

Recommendations which are not within the remit of the unit to implement.

- There is an urgent need to clarify the position of the Sports Complex in the Student Affairs portfolio, as this is the only area within its remit that operates as a campus company. Senior Management needs to clarify the operational relationships in this area.
- University Senior Management needs to define and communicate the role and function of Student Affairs both to the unit itself and to the wider University
- The University should set out in a clear way the mechanisms for re-grading positions and work with Student Affairs to establish priorities and to clarify when re-grading is possible as well as the processes via which re-grading can be achieved.
- Appropriate quality review procedures need to be agreed and pursued.
- There is an urgent need for a review of the structure and function of the Health Centre.

- There is a need to clarify the situation with respect to the development plans for the chaplaincy and the current use of the chaplaincy space for non chaplaincy related activities, such as the National Chamber Choir.
- There needs to be an appropriately negotiated benefit structure to incentivise the Student Affairs team for any additional income generation undertaken by the Unit.
- The PRG noted the potential of a faculty review process to inform decisions about the role of Student Affairs in the context of the University Strategy.