

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Programme



Peer Review Group Report for the Office of Student Life

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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 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 School/Faculty/Office/Centre being reviewed completes a detailed self-assessment report (SAR). It should be noted that this document is confidential to the School/Faculty/Office/Centre as well as the Review Panel and 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 DCU and conduct discussions with a range of relevant staff, students and other stakeholders.
3. The PRG then writes its own report. The School/Faculty/Office/Centre is given the chance to correct possible factual errors before the Peer Group Report (PGR) is finalised.
4. The School/Faculty/Office/Centre 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 draft QuIP are considered by the Quality Promotion Committee.
6. The draft QuIP is discussed in a meeting between the School/Faculty/Office/Centre, members of the Peer Group, the Director of Quality Promotion and members of 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 including the University's 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.

Peer Review Group Report

1. Introduction and Overview

Location

The Office of Student Life (OSL) and its constituent bodies the Club Life Committee (CLC), the Society Life Committee (SLC) and the Students' Union (SU) are centrally located in the Student Centre, known as the "HUB". The OSL, CLC, SLC and SU occupy office space on the first floor of the HUB. On the ground floor they have office space for a Radio Studio and a multi-purpose entertainment centre which has a capacity of 240 to 900 complete with sound, lighting and stage equipment.

The overall HUB building is operated by Campus Property Ltd, a wholly owned company of DCU and is managed by a manager who also looks after other businesses located in the building.

Staff

The OSL directly employees 3 fulltime staff including the manager of OSL, together with 6 part-time staff to support the work of the SLC, CLC and Students' Union. See list of staff below:

Title	Responsibilities	
Manager – Office of Student Life	Management of Office of Student Life and all SU resources, including staff.	f/t
Clubs and Societies Development Officer	Accounting and administration backup for SLC and CLC.	p/t
SU Reception Supervisor – Monday-Wednesday	General secretarial and reception duties. Supervision of CEP staff.	p/t
Accounts Manager	Maintenance of Office of Student Life accounts	p/t
Communications and Marketing Officer	Production of weekly magazine and other marketing functions.	f/t
CEP Supervisor	Administration of Community Employment Project	f/t
Events Co-ordinator	Co-ordination of all events	p/t
SU Reception Supervisor – Wednesday- Friday	General secretarial and reception duties. Supervision of CEP staff.	p/t
Student Engagement Officer	Responsible for the administration of the Uaneen module and Volunteerism	p/t

In addition to the permanent staff listed above, the OSL also sponsors a Community Employment Project funded by FÁS, currently employing 17 participants.

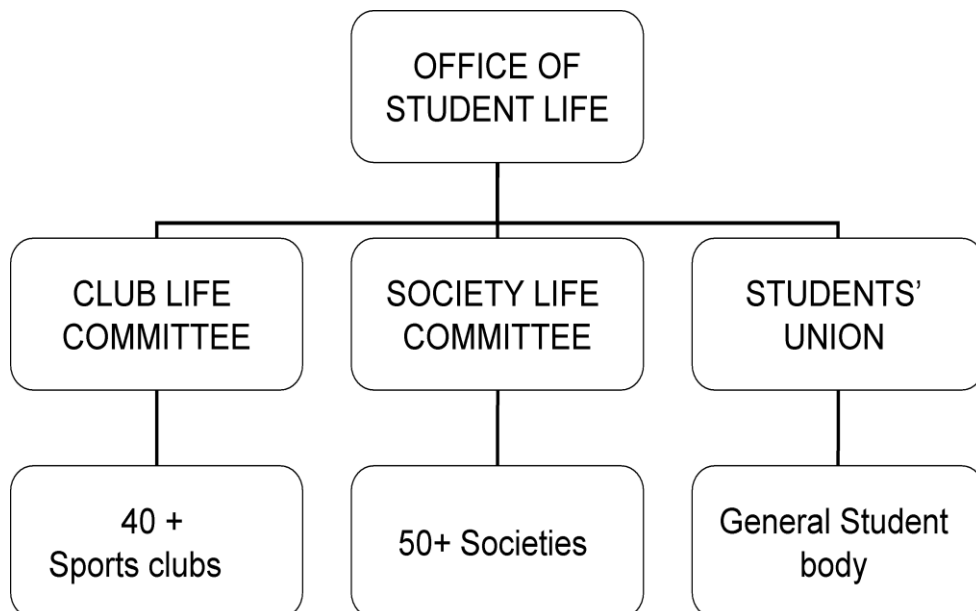
Product / Processes

The Office of Student Life is the umbrella body (see fig.1) which provides support for the DCU's Students' Union, Clubs and Societies. In 1987, the OSL, then known as the Student Finance Committee, was incorporated as a limited company. Currently, the manager of OSL and the Director of Student Development and Learning serve as the directors of the company.

The composition of the OSL represents all the interests it serves. This is expressed in a committee which is constituted as follows:

- Two representatives from the SU
- Two representatives from the SLC
- Two representatives from the CLC
- Two directly elected representatives from the general student body
- One representative from Union Council (class representatives)
- A University representative, the Director of Student Support and Development
- The Manager, Office of Student Life, who acts as Secretary and Treasurer

Figure 1.



Main Activities

Funding – capitation

One of the key responsibilities of the Office of Student Life is to allocate the Capitation fund. Though the structures under which the Office of Student Life operates have remained largely unchanged since the last review in 2005, the level of funding administered by the OSL has grown considerably, reflecting the expansion in student numbers in DCU with approximately 9100 students contributing to the capitation fee in 2009/2010.

Year	1986-87	1991-92	1996-97	2001-02	2004-05	2009-10
Capitation Fund	€120,000	€180,000	€350,000	€619,000	€767,000	€1,200,000

The decision-making structure of the Office of Student Life aims to fairly and effectively distribute the capitation fund to students. The OSL receives the funding and allocates it to the CLC, SLC and to the SU to spend according to their individual policies, which are drawn up yearly and are in line with the broad objectives of the OSL. Funding to individual clubs and societies is decided upon by the student led committees, based on applications by each Club and Society at the beginning of the academic year. The Students' Union budget is devised yearly in consultation with the sabbatical officers and the OSL Manager, who acts as treasurer of the Students' Union.

Enhancement of the Student Experience

One of the stated aims of the OSL is the enhancement of the student experience outside the classroom and laboratory. The principal activity, other than the clubs, societies and students' union which addresses this aim is the Uaneen Module. This module is accredited by the university and formally recognises the learning gained by students' activities. The OSL manages and promotes many of the activities of the Uaneen Module.

Community Employment Project

The OSL sponsors a Community Employment Scheme (CEP) which at the time of the review employed up to 17 temporary staff. The CEP is funded by the state's national training authority FÁS - €200,000 in 2010/11 was injected into the project through salaries, training budgets and material expenses. The staff are drawn from the local community and use their 12 month participation on the scheme to gain valuable work experience and further training. The CEP participants are fully integrated into the OSL with a number of the participants working in related offices across the university.

2. The Self-Assessment Process

The Office of Student Life Quality Review Committee

The OSL Quality Review Committee consisted of at least one representative from each of the constituent bodies of the OSL. See Figure 2
Figure 2 The OSL Review Committee

Committee Member	Role on Committee	Job title
Una Redmond	Chair	Manager- Office of OSL
Sandra McCormack	Quality Liaison Officer	Reception Supervisor
Ed Leamy	SU representative	SU President
Shea McNelis	Staff representative	Events Co-Ordinator
Emer Fitzgerald	Staff representative	Communications and Marketing Officer
Margaret Kinsella	Staff representative	Accounts Officer
Richie Nolan	Societies representative	Chair-Society Life Committee
Katie White	Sports Club representative	Chair- Club Life Committee
Joan Kinsella	CEP representative	Clubs and Soc's Assistant

Methodology adopted during process

The Quality Review Committee met once a week from mid September 2011 to manage the evaluation phase of the review. A number of methods were adopted to seek feedback from key stakeholders and users of the services of the OSL, including focus groups, one-to-one interviews together with a student wide survey. Also, an Away Day, externally facilitated, was organised for both staff and sabbatical officers to consider the effectiveness of the main activities of the OSL and were guided by its mission statement.

The output from the evaluation process and the findings of the previous Quality Review formed the basis for the recommendations included in the Self Assessment Report (SAR).

3. The Peer Review Group Process

The Review Group

Ms Diane Boston, Co-Founder of Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI) in UK, (Chair)

Mr. Ciaran Nevin, President of Dublin Institute of Technology's Student Union

Mr. Ian Russell, Student Activities Officer, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Dr. Carmel Mulcahy, Senior Lecturer, School of Education Studies, DCU

Mr. Martin Leavy, Training & Development Manager, Human Resources Department, DCU, (Rapporteur)

Site Visit Programme

Wednesday 30 November 2011

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
2.00-3.00pm	First meeting of members of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion.	PRG members Dr. Sarah Ingle	A204
3.00-4.00 pm (3.40pm coffee break)	Meeting of members of Peer Review Group to: 1. Select Chair of PRG 2. Confirm suitability of review visit timetable 3. Agree work schedule and assign tasks for the review visit.	PRG members	A204
4.00-5.30 pm	Consideration of Self Assessment Report with members of the Office of Student Life's (OSL) Quality Review Committee.	PRG members Ms. Una Redmond, Manager OSL Quality Review Committee consisting of: Sandra McCormack, Ed Leamy, Shea McNelis, Emer Fitzgerald, Margaret Kinsella, Richard Nolan, Katie White, Joan Kinsella	A204
7.30pm	Dinner for members of PRG, staff of Quality Promotion Office and staff of Office of Student Life.	PRG members Dr. Sarah Ingle, Ms. Fiona Dwyer Ms Una Redmond, Sandra McCormack Ed Leamy, Shea McNelis Emer Fitzgerald, Margaret Kinsella Joan Kinsella, Richard Nolan, Katie White	Tower Suite, Clontarf Castle Hotel

Thursday 1 December 2011

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
8.45 -9.00am	PRG meets privately to prepare for morning meetings.	PRG	
9.00 - 9.25am	PRG meets with Manager of Office of Student Life	Ms. Una Redmond	
9.30 - 10.10am	PRG meets with Sabbatical Officers from DCU Students' Union.	Mr. Ed Leamy, President Mr. Cillian Byrne, Education Officer Mr. Colin Oliver, Welfare Officer	
10.15-10.45am	Break		
10.45am-11.10am	PRG meets with staff/students working in/with OSL	Sandra McCormack, Reception Supervisor Barbara Whittle, Reception Supervisor	
11.15am-11.40am	PRG meets with staff/students working in/with OSL	Siobhan Byrne, Clubs & Socs. Officer Margaret Kinsella, Accounts Officer	
11.50am-12.30pm	PRG meets with staff/students working in/with OSL	Patricia Wheatley, CEP Supervisor Joan Kinsella, CEP Participant Shea McNelis, ENTS Manager Emer Fitzgerald, Comm & Marketing Officer	

Thursday 1 December 2011

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
12.35-12.50pm	PRG meets with staff/students working in/with OSL	Audrey Power, Student Engagement Officer	
1.00-2.00pm	PRG - Brief discussion with Director of Quality if required followed by working lunch.		
2.00-3.00pm	PRG visit to OSL core facilities/offices	Ms Una Redmond	
3.00-4.30pm	PRG meets with representatives of student groupings	Nial McClave – former SU President Stephen Byrne – Societies Officer Paul Doherty – Clubs Officer Killian Martin – CLC Damien Rhatigan – SLC	
4.30-4.45pm	Break		
4.45-5.15pm	Open invitation for any student, or any staff member of Office of Student Life to meet PRG.		
5.15-5.30pm	PRG meets to review and finalise tasks for final day.		
7.30pm	Private working dinner for PRG members.	Peer Review Group meet in the Fahrenheit Restaurant	Clontarf Castle Hotel

Friday 2 December 2011

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
9.00-9.50am	PRG meets with members of Senior Management Group (SMG).	SMG Director of Quality Promotion.	AG01
10.00-10.30am	PRG meets with Chair of Office of Student Life Committee and DCU Senior staff member on this committee.	Mr. Ed Leamy, President DCU Students' Union Dr. Claire Bohan, Director of Student Support & Development	AG01
10.30-11.00am	Break		
11.00-11.30am	PRG meet with DCU senior administrative staff	Joe Jones, Yvonne Mc Gowan,	
11.00-11.50	PRG meet with DCU Senior administrative staff	Damien West, Eamonn Cuggy	
12.00-12.45	PRG meet with DCU senior academic staff	Prof. Richard O'Kennedy, Ms Pauline Willis, Lecturer, DCUBS	
12.45-1.15 pm	Preparation of PRG exit presentation.		
1.15-2.15 pm	PRG working lunch.		
2.15-4.15 pm	Preparation of PRG exit presentation (Coffee 3.30pm).		
4.15-4.45pm	Exit presentation to Office of Student Life staff and students to summarise PRG findings.	PRG, Director of Quality Promotion, Ms Una Redmond, DCU Student's Union Sabbatical Officers and other Office of Student Life staff/student representatives.	

Methodology

Members of the Peer Review Group (PRG) received and familiarised themselves with the content of the Self Assessment Report (SAR) and related appendices in advance of the site visit. The SAR provided a comprehensive overview of the OSL and its operations.

On arrival at DCU, the PRG was provided with a clear context for the review and was briefed as to its remit by the Director of Quality Promotion. At its initial meeting, Ms Diane Boston agreed to act as Chair of the PRG and the Group agreed the draft schedule for the visit. After considering the Director of Quality's briefing and the SAR, the PRG considered what its appropriate remit should be from its initial study of the SAR. It was the PRG's view that in order for it to effectively evaluate the SAR and formulate appropriate recommendations, the focus of the review would be to seek a fuller understanding of its structures, systems and relationships.

The second and third day of the site visit consisted of a site visit and meetings with key stakeholders who engaged fully with the review process.

The PRG's final deliberations focused on principal findings and related recommendations and these form the basis for the PRG report. These findings and recommendations were subject of a presentation to the staff of the OSL, Students' Union, clubs and societies representatives.

Schedule of Activity

At its initial meeting on Wednesday, the PRG agreed the draft schedule of meetings. During the course of the review, the PRG followed the schedule with only minor amendments. On the second day of the visit a site tour and meetings were arranged jointly by the President of the Students' Union and the manager of the OSL. The PRG toured the facilities of the OSL namely the HUB but also other key offices/facilities and their staff e.g. Student Advice Centre, the Interfaith Centre and the Helix.

The PRG noted that the schedule facilitated them in meeting a comprehensive range of staff including: senior management of the university, users of the OSL services namely student representatives, members of clubs and societies, key staff of the university's campus companies and academic and support staff of the university. The PRG felt confident that they had met a number of key stakeholders of the OSL service. The meetings greatly assisted the PRG in gaining a fuller appreciation and understanding of the role and impact of OSL on the life of the university.

View of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG recognised that the preparation of the SAR reflected a considerable effort on behalf of the staff of the OSL and the sabbatical officers of the Students' Union and representatives of clubs and societies.

The SAR comprised five chapters, the first and longest of which dealt with the development of the OSL from its beginnings as the Student Finance Committee in 1987, to its present incarnation, as the Office of Student Life. In the remaining chapters the SAR outlined clearly the processes adopted when undertaking the review, the OSL's mission statement was considered with an evaluation of the OSL in the subsequent chapter. The final chapter outlined a number of recommendations. The SAR also included an appendix of supporting data. The PRG was satisfied that the SAR adequately described the broad range of activities carried out by the OSL and the progress made in implementing recommendations included in 2005 quality review. Also, the SAR openly explored the strengths and weakness of the OSL. The findings and recommendations made in the current SAR were considered by the PRG, many of which were endorsed and confirmed during the site visit.

The SAR and PRG would have benefited from the inclusion of more evidence and data especially in relation to student demographics: for example information on age, gender, mode and level of study of DCU students and their membership of clubs and societies as well as the number of users of the OSL services. It was noted that the SAR could have provided more clarity as to who reported to whom, where responsibility lay between the various constituent parts of the OSL and departments and functions of the university itself. This finding is one of the themes of the report and is addressed further in sections 4 and 5 below.

4. Findings of the Review Group

4.1 Background, Overview, Strategy, Context

The PRG recognises that since the OSL's last review in 2005, the OSL has operated successfully within a university which has not only experienced a large growth in student numbers and funding but increased complexity in the nature of the support offered to a diverse student body. The site visit confirmed to the PRG that the OSL is central to the activities which support and enhance the student experience in DCU. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that OSL is able to support the priorities and direction being set by the new President of DCU.

The PRG did, however, agree with the findings in the SAR that the current mission statement of the OSL needs to be revisited as it does not provide a sufficient focus for the activities of the OSL. The PRG is of the view that an updated statement with a clearly articulated vision has the potential to communicate the purpose of the OSL its staff and constituent bodies to the wider university community. The distinctive role of the OSL is somewhat diminished by its very wide remit and range of activities which have the potential to overlap with the activities undertaken by offices of the university.

Findings in relation to mission, vision, and strategic planning are further addressed in sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 of the report. They, together with the recommendations in section 5, are central to the report as they address the questions raised during the review regarding the identity and purpose of the OSL.

4.2 Organisation and Management

The SAR stated that the organisation and management structure has largely remained unchanged since at least 2005. There is clear evidence, confirmed during the site visit that the functions, including the distribution of the capitation grant, and the services it offers students, together with student enhancement initiatives are largely effective and well managed. The manager and staff of the OSL are held in high regard across the university.

The working relationship and communications between the staff of the OSL and its constituent parts, particularly the sabbatical officers is good, with high levels of cooperation between them. However, the PRG found working relationships are often too reliant on the considerable goodwill built up over the years. It was felt that the OSL might not be able to sustain its current level of performance standards, especially in what appears to be the absence of formal reporting structures between staff of the OSL, its constituent bodies, campus companies and offices of the university. More formality would facilitate the capturing and reporting of decisions made and assist in identifying the appropriate personnel and their specific areas of responsibility and accountability avoiding some confusion with regard to reporting procedures and lines of accountability. The PRG was of the view that this confusion contributed to a certain sense of disconnect between the constituent parts of the OSL, which also extended further to key university functions and associated campus companies.

The PRG felt the OSL will need to be mindful of reaching a balance between maintaining goodwill and fostering good relationships with the rest of the university, developing more formal structures and maintaining its independence from the university. This independence from the university contributed to the degree of creativity that the PRG found in the OSL and its constituent parts. This independence is of particular importance for the Students' Union which must be given the freedom to represent the needs of the student population.

Findings, central to the report in relation to governance issues are included in section 4.7 with recommendations regarding reporting relationships and need for increased formality in the means of communication and decision making, are addressed in section 4.3.

4.3 Staffing and Accommodation

Staffing

The PRG noted that the OSL has had stable staff numbers with many of the staff having long service with the office. The organisational knowledge of this relatively small group (9) is considerable and together with the staff's commitment, contributes hugely to the effectiveness of its activities. The 17 staff of the Community Employment Project, fully funded by FÁS, play a significant role in the delivery of many of the services of the OSL. More consideration should be given to the negative impact on the services if FÁS withdrew funding from the project.

The PRG found there was an absence of a formal performance review procedure which may have resulted in a lack of structured training programme for staff. Many current OSL staff have been in place for a number of years and their responsibilities have developed over time. There do not appear to be updated staff job descriptions to reflect these developments and these need to be reviewed if an effective performance management is to be introduced. A possible outcome of such an exercise would be that some staff might be found to be working above their current grade. This should not prevent the exercise from taking place, rather it should lead to a review of priorities for staff time and staff responsibilities with the opportunity for the OSL to produce a roles and responsibility matrix from which an effective training programme can emerge.

Accommodation

The PRG was impressed with the office accommodation on the first floor of the HUB which accommodates the OSL, representatives of the Students' Union and clubs and societies. There is an issue of limited non-commercial space in the HUB especially for societies involved in increasingly popular performing arts societies. The main concern of the PRG focused on the relationship with Campus Property Ltd and the lack of clarity around its roles and responsibilities, as well as how space and facilities are managed and utilised by the university. Again, recurrent themes of lack of clarity around who is responsible for what, clear reporting lines and the lack of formal structures reoccur.

4.4 Management of Financial and other Resources

Management of Financial Resources

The Office of Student Life (OSL), formerly the Student Finance Committee, was originally established to deal with the efficient administration of the capitation fund collected from students to fund the Students' Union and Student Clubs and Societies. Although the role of the OSL has expanded over the years, the role of financial management and of other resources is still a very large and important function of the office.

The PRG commends the OSL for undertaking what appears to have been a root and branch review of the financial operations of the OSL and its constituent bodies in 2009. However, the PRG notes from the SAR that:

Though the structures under which the Office of Student Life operates have remained largely unchanged, the level of funding administered by the OSL has grown enormously...

As referred in other parts of the report, relationships between the OSL and the University are of an informal nature including with the University Finance Office. This has resulted in a lack of recorded discussions and agreements. The accounting practices of the OSL and the Finance Office are on a sound footing, however, the PRG was unclear as to the extent of the level of oversight from the university with regard to financial matters. Also, it would appear that the constituent parts of the OSL, through the OSL executive which includes the elected officers, do not meet regularly to input into the drawing up of annual budgets based on officer team objectives resulting in a lack of prioritisation of activities by officers.

4.5 Functions, Activities and Processes

Functions

The PRG found little evidence of the OSL undertaking any significant planning and developing activities for itself and noted the absence of any medium term (3-5) year Strategic Plan to deliver on its mission. As mentioned in section 4.1, revisiting the current mission statement in consultation with all stakeholders (including student members not currently involved in its work) and creating a vision statement reflecting the independent and individual identity of the OSL would provide direction for such activities. In the meantime, in the absence of formulated plans and medium term strategies, any difficulties associated with the annual officer change-over should be minimised.

Activities

As Student Representation is at the heart of the OSL, it is essential that elected student leaders have access to the best quality training both in the representational role they have to undertake and the operational and specifically DCU aspects of their post. Officers will be empowered both through the representation opportunities they have within the DCU governance but also through membership of the OSL Board and the clarity the roles and responsibilities matrix will bring.

The PRG believe it is important that the OSL and student officers have a busy and rich connection with and feedback from the University on which to base informed opinion. It is also important that the OSL is able to support students in their own advocacy with key student and university bodies. It was noted that in a number of

UK students' unions there is a specific, named post to support officer representation role on University committees and with the members.

Processes

As stated earlier, the PRG is of the view that the OSL needs to further develop its budgeting and prioritising processes with named budget holder responsibilities in order to ensure clarity of governance and accountability. The PRG found that the Board of the company would appear not to be operating according to best practice in relation to the holding of meetings and the production of written reports.

It will be the company's Board of Directors' responsibility to ensure the OSL implements the recommendations in this report in relation to strategy, mission and values statement which should also assist with the introduction of a number of crucial processes e.g. a good performance management system, good budgeting, prioritising and financial management and effective officer and staff training.

4.6 User/Customer/Supplier Perspective

As the OSL is established to serve the needs of students across a range of areas, it is the view of the PRG that student opinion must inform the work of the OSL. The PRG met with student representatives from Clubs, Societies, the Students Union, and the Uaneen Module. While these representatives had a range of opinions on their experience, it is important that students who do not typically engage in any of the above activities are also considered by the OSL in the work that it does.

The students interviewed by the PRG were clearly impressed with the OSL as a whole, and their enthusiasm for their particular area of involvement was quite evident. The issues raised were typically related to infrastructural matters or facilities. This did, however, point to a frustration amongst the students as to how to tackle these issues within the OSL.

Students appear to use specific terms such as OSL or SU interchangeably, which suggests confusion over the structures. This, together with students' lack of clarity as to who or which function deals with issues, could be leading to some of the frustration around how issues are dealt.

As outlined in 4.3, the PRG found that space management is an issue of some concern to the OSL and students alike. Student representatives identified a shortage of space, access issues and possibly the underutilisation of space for student activities. It is clear that as the University grows, it will require more and more space but it is important that the balance between academic space and non-commercial space for student activities is not disturbed.

Communication between the constituent groups appears to have, on occasion, broken down over some key decisions. It is important that there are clear reporting lines between the constituent groups, so as to ensure that students do not feel left

out of the decision making process. As has been previously highlighted (see section 4.3) some key committees would appear not to have been sitting on a regular basis e.g. HUB Management Committee, OSL committee, OSL Board.

At its meeting with the PRG, students expressed concern over the apparent academic encroachment by some Faculties into Wednesday afternoons, creating a perceived lack of parity. It was felt that this was hindering student engagement with the constituent groups of the OSL, in particular adversely affecting non-traditional and commuter students. The University has expressed a very strong appreciation for the work of the OSL and this reputational capital should be used by the student organisations to lobby for the preservation of Wednesday afternoons as time for co-curricular, enhancement activities.

The PRG is of the view that issues regarding timetabling and its impact on the student experience require a more in-depth look at how student activities can be incorporated into the student timetable. Perhaps recognition of the academic benefits of student engagement in such activities, throughout the University, could help to make this a reality.

4.7 Staff Perspective

The PRG were impressed with the work of the Office of Student Life (OSL) and the passion its staff, student officers and volunteers have for its activities. At the PRG's meeting with the DCU Executive, the University President stressed that the OSL was part of the core of the University.

The OSL has been given strong leadership and has good relationships within the University but the PRG's view is that the time has come to clarify and focus the work of the OSL for the future.

The PRG noted that all the staff who work with student clubs, societies, the students' union and on other OSL activities are employees of an independent company, the Student Finance Committee, which is a company limited by guarantee. As stated in section 4.6 of the report, the lack of regular meetings can limit the function of Board of Directors and how it directs, as required in law, according to its *Articles* and *Memoranda of Incorporation* for the benefit of students and other stakeholders, including the OSL staff. The Board needs to take responsibility for future proofing the OSL, ensuring that it is a good employer and that organisational memory is captured and used as part of the staff and annual officer training and development programme.

The Manager of the OSL has a responsibility to report to that Board on a regular basis. She is in effect the company Chief Executive Officer. The PRG found that the membership of the Board was quite limited and would benefit from being widened to represent the OSL constituent parts, the university community and external Board members who would bring a wider perspective and expertise. This would also support the Manager in the execution of her role. The OSL Manager can then be

tasked by the Board with developing medium term strategic and annual operational plans with its constituent parts which can be overseen by the Board through regular reporting and good line management of the OSL Manager who then in turn can performance manage staff in line with these plans.

4.8 Overall Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns

<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Commitment and enthusiasm of staff and elected officers</i> • <i>Student focused</i> • <i>Strong personal relationships across university community</i> • <i>Some demonstrable enhancement of the student experience</i> 	<p><i>Weakness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of strategic framework and planning processes</i> • <i>Lack of clarity around certain roles and structures</i> • <i>Informal nature of organisational relationships</i> • <i>Some disconnection between the OSL's constituent parts</i>
<p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Need to build upon the considerable good will in place</i> • <i>The emerging DCU strategy</i> • <i>OSL company structure already in place</i> • <i>Important time to review OSL priorities</i> 	<p><i>Concerns</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of formal working structures and associated governance</i> • <i>Services spread too thinly due to lack of priorities and lack of planning</i> • <i>Vulnerability to key staff changes in OSL and DCU</i> • <i>Informal decisions made but not formally recorded</i>

5. Recommendations for ongoing improvement

There are three levels of priority used for the recommendations of this report:

- P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.
- P2: A recommendation that is important, but can, or perhaps must, be addressed on a more extended time scale.
- P 3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities.

The level(s) of the University where action is required:

- A: Area under review (Office of Student Life)
- U: University Senior Management

Recommendations for Improvement in the OSL

No.	P1, P2, P3	U,A	Recommendation
1	P1	A	Revisit the current OSL mission statement in consultation with all stakeholders (including student members not currently involved in its work)
2	P1	A	Create a vision statement for the future which clearly reflects the independent and individual identity of the OSL
3	P1	A	Develop a medium term (3 – 5 year) strategic plan to deliver the revised mission and values which in turn should be informed by the DCU Strategic Plan.
4	P1	A/U	Use the current Board structure to manage the OSL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expand the Board to include representatives from OSL, SU, SLC, CLC - supplement by recruiting three Independent Board members to bring in external expertise and support, for example in HR, Finance, the not for profit sector or the law
5	P1	A	The company Board should meet regularly. The Board of OSL should take responsibility for the future proofing of the OSL by ensuring organisational memory is captured and used as part of a programme for the staff and Sabbatical Officers training and development.
6	P1	A	Establish a more formal budgetary process for the OSL and its constituent bodies to ensure greater transparency and accountability on expenditure decisions.
7	P1	A	Draw up annual budgets so that elected officers can be involved in prioritising spending and activities for members.
8	P1	A	Budgets to be presented to the OSL Executive Committee and Board on annual basis for approval in line with current procedures for the distribution of the capitation funds among the constituent bodies.
9	P2	A	Ensure that appropriate financial procedures are maintained and further developed in relation to the distribution and spending of student monies.
10	P1	A	OSL Executive Committee to meet regularly during semesters and clarify the reporting roles within the OSL and its constituent bodies.
11	P2	A/U	Clarify role of HUB Manager (Campus Property Limited). PRG suggests that it would be helpful if the Manager could be given a place on the OSL board in return for student representation on the Campus Property Ltd who manages the HUB.
12	P2	A/U	Review of all space currently provided for student activities, with a view to maximizing the potential of this space in the future.
13	P1	A/U	Ensure representatives of each of the OSL constituent organisations work with the University to establish parity of experience across disciplines where possible by preserving Wednesday afternoons for student activities.
14	P1	A	Improve good governance by producing a schedule of formal meetings between the OSL and the University Finance Office and its director. These meetings should include discussions on financial issues including, but not exclusively, the capitation budget for the coming year and the presentation of the OSL annual audited accounts.
15	P2	A/U	Produce an Annual Report of its activities which will also include the audited accounts and presented to Governing Authority by the manager of the OSL and President of the SU.
16	P2	A	Publish an annual impact report (which may incorporate the annual report in recommendation 15) which can be used as a marketing tool to inform the academic staff, students and wider university of the activities and achievements of the OSL and its constituent parts.
17	P1	A	Undertake a review, by the OSL and its Staffing Committee, of the relevant positions within its remit so as to ensure that the job specifications are in line with the realities of the job with roles, reporting lines and responsibilities clearly stated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff appraisals/Performance Reviews should take place annually (and consider adopting the university's Performance Management Development Scheme) - ensure all reporting lines are clear and create a roles and responsibilities matrix - examine contracts for the Sabbatical Officers for the Students' Union in line with employment legislation policy whilst taking into account local and national budgetary constraints. <p>The review could also examine the issue of re-grading of posts and any policies relating to pay, increments, long service etc.</p>
18	P2	A	Put in place a succession plan for key personnel within its organisation with a view to ensuring the long-term success of the OSL as well as minimising disruption to the activities of the OSL and its constituent bodies in the event key members of staff are absent from their post for prolonged periods.

19	P1	A	The OSL to implement, in conjunction with the SU, CLC and SLC, a comprehensive year long training programme for student leaders engaged with the OSL and its constituent bodies.
20	P1	A/U	Consult with the HR/Training and Development in how best to provide support for the OSL Manager and /or an HR expert if appoint to as one of the External Board members (see recommendation 4).
21	P2	A	Provide more support to student representatives in their advocacy role by a named post holder (consider certain UK models)
22	P1	A	Ensure the OSL adopts a similar practice to the university where the university publishes a schedule of all committee meetings at the beginning of each academic year.
23	P1	A	Arrange scheduled meetings of the OSL Executive Committee to ensure effective communication between the OSL, SU, CLC and SLC. Each constituent part of the OSL should work to establish an integrated annual programme of work with key performance indicators that take cognisance of their respective strategic plans (if in place)

(End)