



# IRIU

# REPORT

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF  
**DUBLIN CITY  
UNIVERSITY**

~ JUNE 2010 ~



# THE IRIU OF DCU

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## THE REVIEW REPORT

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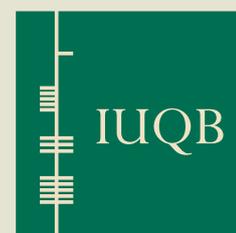


## FOREWORD BY THE IUQB

THE IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD (IUQB) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2002 TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE A CULTURE OF QUALITY IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION AND INDEPENDENTLY EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUALITY PROCESSES IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES, AS REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997.

IN 2004, THE IUQB AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY (HEA) JOINTLY COMMISSIONED THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION (EUA) TO UNDERTAKE A CUSTOMISED VERSION OF ITS INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME (IEP) AS THE FIRST CYCLE OF INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEWS OF THE SEVEN IRISH UNIVERSITIES.

IN 2009, FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH A RANGE OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS, IUQB FINALISED THE PROCESS FOR THE SECOND CYCLE OF INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY REVIEWS. THIS PROCESS, WHICH OPERATES IN LINE WITH NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND AGREED EUROPEAN STANDARDS, IS TERMED THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES (IRIU). REPORTS ARISING FROM INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEWS OF AND BY IRISH UNIVERSITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997, ARE PUBLISHED AT: [HTTP://REVIEWS.IUQB.NET/](http://reviews.iuqb.net/).



IRISH UNIVERSITIES  
QUALITY BOARD



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW  
OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES

## THE REVIEW TEAM

The DCU review was conducted by the following team of six reviewers selected by the IUQB Board from the IRIU Register of Reviewers in September 2009. The Review Team was trained by the IUQB on the requirements of the IRIU process on Tuesday 16 February 2010. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a Planning Visit to DCU on Wednesday 17 February 2010. The Main Review Visit was conducted by the full Team between 1 and 4 March 2010. The IUQB Board approved the release of the DCU reports for publication on Monday 14 June 2010.

### **Professor Robert Glidden, President Emeritus, Ohio University, US (Chair)**

- » Founding Chair of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- » Undertaken reviews/accreditations on more than 45 institutions or programmes, including the EUA IEP reviews of NUI Galway & Trinity College Dublin in 2004/2005
- » Actively engaged in the development of strategic and operational approaches to the management of quality assurance and accreditation in the US

### **Mr Thierry Malan, recently retired General Inspector for Administration of the National Education and Research (IGAENR), Ministry of Education and Research, France**

- » European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) & EUA reviewer, Deputy-Chair of the EQAR Appeals Committee
- » Former member of the International Institute of Educational Planning Council of Consultant Fellows (UNESCO)

### **Professor Gerard Wrixon, President Emeritus, University College Cork (UCC), Ireland**

- » University College Cork, President 1999-2007
- » Committee member, Higher Education Authority (HEA) Commissioned Review of the IUQB in 2008
- » National Microelectronic Research Centre (NMRC) Chair IS09000 Accreditation Committee 1995-1999

### **Ms Anita Līce, Former Vice-Chairperson, European Students' Union (ESU), Latvia**

- » Vice-Chair of the European Students' Union (2008-2009), co-responsible for QA matters including ESU's pool of experts
- » EUA reviewer
- » Numerous student representative posts held institutionally, nationally and at a European level

### **Dr Barbara Haering, Director, econcept Inc, Switzerland**

- » European Research Advisory Board (ERAB) member
- » President of the Board of the IDHEAP (Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration)
- » Member of the National Parliament of Switzerland (1990 – 2007), Chaired the Committee on Science, Education and Culture

### **Dr David Cairns, Former QAA Assistant Director, UK**

- » Assistant Director, UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (1997-2009). Reviews Group 1997-2002, Development and Enhancement, 2002-2009. Assistant Director, UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Development and Enhancement (1997-2009)
- » Coordinated QAA institution-level reviews and audits of overseas partnership links, 1997-2009
- » Independent higher education consultant



IRIU

# REVIEW REPORT

## SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

### THE UNIVERSITY

Dublin City University (“DCU” or “the University”) was established by the Dublin City University Act in 1989 and is the most recently established of Ireland’s seven Universities. The University is based on the Glasnevin campus developed by its immediate predecessor, the National Institute of Higher Education, Dublin, which had been established in the 1980s. Since its foundation, DCU has been led by two Presidents: its founding President, Dr. Daniel O’Hare and, since June 2000, his successor, Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski. At the time of this review, the University had recently announced that at the end of his 10-year term of office, Professor von Prondzynski’s successor would be Professor Brian MacCraith, formerly Head of the National Centre for Sensor Research (NCSR) and presently Director of the Optical Sensors Laboratory & Biomedical Diagnostics Institute, both of which are based at the University. In the course of its review visit, the IRIU team was able to meet privately both the current President and the President-Designate.

The University’s Glasnevin Campus is situated in North Dublin, a short distance from Dublin International Airport and the M1 Motorway. There is residential accommodation for approximately 1,100 students on the campus, who have access to a range of services and facilities including the Library, a conference and arts centre (The Helix), a student building, and sports facilities. Campus arrangements are discussed further elsewhere in this report.

At the time of this review, more than 10,700 students were registered to study at the University itself, of whom more than 7,300 were studying at undergraduate level, more than 2,400 were studying for taught postgraduate awards and more than 650 were researching for PhD awards.

In addition to the undergraduate and postgraduate students registered to study on its campus, DCU also awards degrees to students of three Linked Colleges: St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, where more than 1,800 undergraduates and more than 660 postgraduates are studying for DCU awards; Mater Dei Institute, where more than 730 undergraduate and postgraduate students are studying for DCU awards; and All Hallows College, where 330 students are studying for DCU awards. The University’s arrangements with its Linked Colleges are discussed further elsewhere in this report. In December 2009, the University employed more than 430 academic staff and more than 420 support and administrative staff.

### MISSION

In December 2008, the University’s Governing Authority adopted a new Strategic Plan for 2009-11 that set out the following mission and values:

- ~ DCU’s mission is to foster creativity and knowledge to stimulate change for the benefit of society.

The University aims to deliver its mission and strategic vision through the following values:

- ~ DCU is an innovative, pro-active, challenging, creative, engaged and inclusive University within a community that is stimulating, collaborative, supportive and collegial.

In setting out its mission and values in this way, the University addressed one of the recommendations of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) commissioned from the European Universities Association (EUA) by IUQB and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2005 (the 2005 institutional evaluation report). In March 2010, the University was poised to publish a new Strategic Plan. This had been held back from its intended date of publication to allow DCU to respond to changes in the national and international environment for higher education. Among other matters, the new Strategic Plan will make provision for closer collaboration between DCU and other higher education institutions in Ireland.

### GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The University's President is responsible to the 24-member Governing Authority for planning and delivering DCU's work. He is supported by his Senior Management Group, which includes the Deputy President and Registrar, the University Secretary, the Vice-President for Learning and Innovation, the Vice-President for Research, the Director of Finance, and the Director of Human Resources. The membership of the Senior Management Group includes key decision-makers but it is not a decision-making body; rather, its remit is to inform and advise the President. The University Executive has a wider membership and the authority to make decisions. The Education Committee, the Quality Promotion Committee, and the Budget Committee report to the University Executive, while the Education Committee also reports to the Academic Council.

The University's Academic Council "controls the academic affairs of the University", including the curriculum. It discharges its responsibilities through a number of committees that report to it. At University level, these include the University Standards Committee, the Research Committee, and the Learning Innovation Advisory Panel. The Education Committee, renamed from the Academic Strategy Committee in 2008 and chaired by the Deputy President/Registrar, is responsible for overseeing and shaping DCU's academic strategy, which includes the process for ensuring the effectiveness of new programmes.

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### *FACULTIES, SCHOOLS AND RESEARCH CENTRES*

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DCU delivers its programmes of study and much of its support for learning and teaching through four Faculties that oversee the work and the budgets of 19 Schools and academic groups: the Faculty of Business (five academic groups); the Faculty of Engineering and Computing (three Schools); the Faculty of Science and Health (six Schools); and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (five Schools). The Executive Deans of the Faculties report to the University's Deputy President. The University hosts 18 Research Centres (many of which provide opportunities for supervised postgraduate research and post-doctoral research), each linked to one or more of the Faculties. Additionally, DCU hosts "spin-off" and "spin-in" companies, some of which provide opportunities for postgraduate research and employment for post-doctoral researchers.

The University has devolved budgets to the Deans and to the Heads of Support Units (for example, Student Support and Development, and the Library), who are required to operate balanced budgets.

### APPROACH TO QUALITY

The University has developed a multi-layered approach to quality. One layer consists of the University's own internal review activities in which quality reviews of functional units (such as administrative and support

# SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

services, schools, faculties, and research centres) and reviews of topics that are relevant to the whole institution (such as the experience of first-year students and of postgraduate research students) lead to improvement through implementing the findings and action plans that flow from the reviews. The University's participation in external reviews (such as this IRIU and its predecessor in 2005) and external accreditations of its many vocational and professional programmes by professional bodies such as Engineers Ireland and agencies such as An Bord Altranais (the Irish Nursing Board) provide a further layer. The University also operates well-established external examining arrangements that provide it with advice on the standing of its programmes and the achievements of its students. Additionally, DCU staff engages in the work of the IUQB, the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, and that of many professional associations. This participation constitutes a further layer through which the University learns of good practice nationally and internationally and shares its expertise.

From its discussions with members of staff and students, the ISAR and other documents that it saw, the review team concluded that much thought and attention had been given by members of the University to the recommendations of the report of the 2005 institutional evaluation report. The team was also able to see considerable evidence of the actions that had been taken in response to that report and to DCU's own internal reviews and the associated quality improvement plans. This evidence is discussed further in Sections 3 and 4 of this report. These actions show how, in developing its "Topic Reviews" and the "Academic Framework for Innovation", the University can fairly claim to be at the cutting edge in terms of academic quality improvement.

The review team considers that the University has devoted much thought, time, and energy to quality assurance and quality improvement and that it has succeeded in embedding a commendable institution-wide quality culture. A challenge for the University as it moves forward (one shared by many other higher education institutions) is to draw its taught and postgraduate research students more closely and actively into its quality culture.

### EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Through the ISAR, its discussions with staff at all levels and with students, the review team came to understand the consequences for the University of the current reductions in State funding in Ireland. Under the provisions of Ireland's Employment Control Framework, DCU is required to reduce its staff numbers by six per cent over two years (2009 and 2010) from their December 2008 levels. (The review team understood that the Employment Control Framework operates in the higher education sector in accordance with Irish Government policy on public sector recruitment generally, the purpose being to facilitate a permanent, structural reduction in the numbers of staff serving in the sector. The team further understood that this revised framework will operate in the sector until 31 December 2010.)

As the newest of Ireland's Universities, DCU lacks the substantial endowments and support by alumni of some of its peers, although it has benefited from some notable acts of individual philanthropy. The University's prudent approach to its finances has enabled it to manage its affairs soundly to date and to support a carefully thought through programme of improvements to its estate and its teaching, learning support and research provision. Even so, staff and students who spoke to the review team were able to point

to instances where reduced finances were already causing the University to propose the withdrawal of some options from students, such as reduced access to electronic journals for study and research; and larger classes, leading to reduced access to tutors for individual students. The team suggests that this evidence of damaging consequences for students of the reductions the University has been required to make to its support for learning, teaching and research should be shared with the Governing Authority, stakeholders and policy-makers.

One of the University's responses to changes in the financial and policy frameworks for higher education in Ireland has been to intensify its collaboration with other universities across Ireland and internationally. Within Ireland, as mentioned earlier, it is exploring closer links with other higher education institutions. Senior members of DCU explained to the review team how its closer collaboration with these institutions would be mutually beneficial. The team considers that there are sound arguments in favour of closer collaboration between DCU and its prospective partners and encourages the University to maintain its efforts to bring about such collaboration.

## INTERNAL EFFECTIVENESS

### *THE GOVERNING AUTHORITY*

The review team met a small group drawn from the University's Governing Authority, only one of whom was an external member. The review team also read papers that had been provided by the University to inform decisions of the Governing Authority regarding developments by DCU in the quality assurance of teaching, learning, and support for research, including for postgraduate research students, and in the quality improvement of these activities. Extracts of minutes of the Governing Authority meetings at which these matters had been considered suggested to the team that the associated discussions might not have helped the Governing Authority to appreciate the significance of the University's achievements in these areas, or that they might be worth communicating to external stakeholders.

The review team learned that the Governing Authority met several times each year and that, from time to time and at the request of the University, ad hoc working groups of members had been established to look at particular matters. From its discussions with the small group of Governing Authority members which it met, the team understood that the Authority did not play a major role in formulating policy decisions. The 2004 OECD Report on Higher Education in Ireland made recommendations to improve the effectiveness and strategic focus of the governing bodies of the Irish Universities that included reducing their membership to no more than 20 (including student members) with a significant majority of lay members. In keeping with these recommendations and its own observations, the team recommends that the University establish a small standing committee of the Governing Authority, drawn from its external members, to convene between meetings of the full Governing Authority. Such a standing committee could provide the University and its leaders with valuable support in championing DCU in Ireland's presently challenging financial and policy environment. The establishment of such a committee would also provide opportunities for external members of the Governing Authority to become more closely acquainted with the University's work.

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

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### *THE UNIVERSITY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT GROUP AND THE UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE*

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As noted earlier, the membership of the University's Senior Management Group includes the President and other key decision-makers but it is the University Executive that has the power to make decisions, and it is this body to which internal analyses and review reports are sent. The review team found some evidence that this distinction between the Senior Management Group and the University Executive might not be well understood across the University. The team suggests that the University seek an alternative title to that of "Senior Management Group" in order to make it more clearly understood by the University community that this is a coordinating body rather than a decision-making group.

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### *IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND PLANS*

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The University's four Faculties, led by the Executive Deans, provide the means through which academic policies and plans, determined centrally and endorsed by the Academic Council and/or the University Executive, can be implemented across the institution. Before the fortnightly meetings of the University Executive, the four Executive Deans meet together to consider matters of joint interest. They report to the University's Deputy President but only meet with her as a group every two months, although the Deputy President meets individual Deans more frequently as necessary. Reflecting on these arrangements, the review team considered that it would enhance the consistency with which academic policies and plans requiring University-wide implementation could be disseminated and implemented if the Executive Deans, as a group, were to meet with the Deputy President more frequently than at present.

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### *INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, DATA AND INFORMATION FOR MANAGEMENT*

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The ISAR described a considerable programme of institutional research that had been undertaken to supply the information that underpinned the University's self-assessments. As part of its briefing for this IRIU review the University arranged meetings for the review team with members of the Steering Group that had presided over the production of the ISAR. Through these meetings the team learned of the significant contribution that the University's Institutional Research and Analysis Officer, among others, was making to the development and improvement of the University through the analysis of institutional data and information. The University's establishment of this post in the Office of the President represents an effective initial step towards addressing the recommendation in the 2005 report that it should "make more systematic and effective use" of the data it collects for management and improvement purposes (See also below, Section 3, "Management of Information" and Section 4: "Your Voice. Heard").

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### *ALIGNMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC AND QUALITY PLANS*

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The 2005 report of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) commented on weaknesses in the implementation of the 2000-2005 strategic plan, "Leading Change", and the University's quality review processes, and recommended that DCU "align the quality review process with the university's strategic processes". The 2005 report stated that "quality should be pivotal to the strategic planning process". The University has interpreted the recommendation as a call for it to link its five-year planning cycle and what had been, at the time of the 2005 Institutional Quality Review, a five-year cycle of internal quality reviews.

As Sections 3 and 4 of this report show, since 2005 the University has radically reshaped its internal review arrangements. While the new arrangements have many advantages, their introduction has rendered the achievement of any simple link between internal review and strategic planning more difficult for the time being.

While the ISAR frankly acknowledged that the University needed to make progress in synchronising its quality reviews and its strategic planning cycle, DCU has nonetheless made some progress in this matter. In order to identify common themes and to prepare for the present IRIU, the University conducted three analyses of the findings of its internal reviews of academic, administrative and support units and research centres. The review team recommends that the University continue to work to synchronise its internal review cycle and its strategic planning cycle, and suggests that this might be achieved most readily by arranging for its next institutional review to be conducted a year before finalising its strategic plan. The team also suggests that the University continue with its admirable reviews of the common themes in its internal review reports, which are in themselves good practice.

### COMMENDATIONS

The review team commends the University...

- 1.1 for the way in which it has brought about a quality culture that permeates the institution.
- 1.2 for its development of “common themes” in its internal reviews.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The review team recommends that the University...

- 1.3 establish a small standing committee of the Governing Authority, drawn from its external members, to be convened between meetings of the full Governing Authority, and that it seeks opportunities for external members of the Governing Authority to become more closely acquainted with the University’s work.
- 1.4 continue its efforts to synchronise its internal review cycle and its strategic planning cycle.

## SECTION 2

## INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (ISAR)

### ENGAGEMENT WITH IRIU

The University participated in the development of the IRIU process through its President's membership in the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), through which the IRIU process is managed. The Registrar and the Director of the University's Quality Promotion Unit are members of the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee, a body that had worked with IUQB to define the IRIU process set out in the IRIU Handbook.

The review team saw evidence (including publications) showing that DCU staff participated in IUQB and other quality improvement activities. The team was also told by DCU staff that the University was using national guidelines in the development of its procedures, such as those of the IUQB National Guidelines for the supervision of PhD students. The review team is satisfied that the University and its staff are fully engaged with the IRIU process and playing a full part in the work of IUQB and other quality networks in Ireland and further afield.

### THE INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (ISAR)

In preparing the ISAR, the University followed the recommendations in the IRIU Handbook. It established a 15-member Steering Group that was representative of the University community as a whole, the members of which included the President, other members of the Senior Management Group, and members of the University's Quality Promotion Committee (QPC). The Steering Group also oversaw the collection and analysis of data and information to support the production of the ISAR.

In addition to the data and information routinely collected by the University and that was considered in drawing up the ISAR, the perspectives of participants in two series of specially convened focus group meetings were included. Participants in one series of meetings were drawn from staff engaged in teaching and learning; in research and commercialisation; in the administration and support activities of DCU; staff from units (Schools, Faculties and Support Units) that had recently been internally reviewed; and a group of committee members nominated by the Chairs of University committees. The other series of five meetings was with students studying at the University and identified with the assistance of the Students' Union and Student Services. Three of these groups were drawn from the undergraduate student body to provide a cross-section of experience (first year; mid-career; final year). The membership of two further groups was drawn from taught postgraduates and research postgraduate students. The University also conducted web-based surveys of the student body that elicited more than 1,800 responses and used a dedicated web site to provide updates on the IRIU process and draft material (including drafts of the ISAR) for comment from DCU students and staff. The ISAR was approved by the QPC and the Steering Group at the end of January 2010 for submission to IUQB and to support the IRIU.

Members of the Steering Group met the Chair and Coordinating Reviewer during their planning visit to the University and met all the review team during the main review visit. The review team observed that the student representatives on the Steering Group had played a full part in its preparation and had been instrumental in securing the participation of a good cross-section of the University's student body in the focus group meetings referred to above.

The thoroughness with which the University had researched and prepared the information base for compiling the ISAR, and the inclusive methodology the Steering Group had followed, typifies the seriousness of the University's commitment to quality assurance and quality improvement. It is the team's view that the process of preparing the ISAR should be recognised as a quality improvement activity in its own right. The team also came to the view that the process the University had followed in preparing the ISAR and, subsequently, in reflecting on the insights it had gained into the work of DCU, provided clear evidence of a commendable quality culture dedicated to improvement.

Throughout the review, the review team found the ISAR to be a well-drafted and comprehensive document that served as a helpful guide to the University and its work. Among much else, the ISAR set out the findings of the 2005 EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme review of the University and DCU's responses to them and to the linked sectoral report. This was helpful and further exemplified the care that the University has devoted to considering and acting on the findings of external and internal reviews.

## COMMENDATIONS

The review team commends the University...

- 2.1 and its staff for being fully engaged with the IRIU process and for participating in the work of IUQB and other quality networks in Ireland and further afield.
- 2.2 for the level and extent of cross-institutional participation throughout the process of self-assessment and compiling the ISAR, the conscientiousness of its preparation and its clarity and candour. The team considers that the process of preparing the ISAR has been a quality enhancement measure in itself that has made a significant contribution to the University's quality culture.

## SECTION 3

## QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### RESPONSE TO THE 2005 INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

As noted earlier, in 2004-05 the University participated in the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme. The report of that evaluation was published in April 2005. It praised many aspects of the University's work and made 25 recommendations for improvements. The University's ISAR for this IRIU listed the recommendations of the 2005 report and set out the University's responses to each of them.

Two examples of the University's approach in addressing the recommendations of the 2005 report may be helpful here. First, the recommendation that the University increases the number of PhD students it recruits has been put into effect, leading to a substantial rise in the number of PhD students registered with the University, from 242 in 2005 to 571 in 2009-10. Second, the recommendation that the University seeks to enhance the flexibility of its curriculum and the way it is delivered, in order to provide those in full-time and part-time employment and those studying remotely with greater access to higher education, has been addressed through the development of the Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI). The AFI has affected every programme and taught module across the University. Other recommendations on internationalisation, the development of a Mission and Values statement, and strategies for the more systematic development of research links with industrial partners, have been dealt with no less thoroughly.

There are, however, two areas where recommendations made in the 2005 report have not been fully addressed. These are 1) the development of a "robust system of performance appraisal, capable of assessing, rewarding and sanctioning staff teaching performance", and 2) the alignment of the University's quality review processes with its strategic planning processes. Overall, however, the present review team is confident that the University has engaged with the recommendations in the 2005 report in a thoroughgoing manner.

### PROCEDURES FOR ENSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UNIVERSITY'S TEACHING, LEARNING, RESEARCH AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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#### *ASSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF NEW PROVISION*

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The University's quality procedures require those proposing a new programme of study first to submit the programme concept, including the business case for the proposal, and projected resource requirements, for approval by a sub-committee of the Education Committee. The University refers to this process as "validation". Proposals for new programmes must be supported by the relevant Faculty. The sub-committee also checks to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications and the University's credit rating and other related arrangements.

Proposals that are validated by the sub-committee and approved by the Education Committee may then be developed by the proposers. When proposals and required supporting documentation have been fully developed they are submitted to the University's accreditation process. This is managed by the Office of the Deputy President/Registrar and involves close co-operation between the office and the relevant Faculty/Faculties. The merits of the proposal are evaluated for the University by a panel of peer experts (referred to as an "Accreditation Board"), including several external to the University. Accreditation Boards are chaired by a senior member of the University and supported by a senior member of the Office of the Deputy President/Registrar. Accreditation documents are required to provide a programme descriptor (learning outcomes at the programme level) and set out the structure of the proposed programme; module outlines; learning outcomes for each module; how marks and credits will be assigned; assessment arrangements including criteria and how these link to the learning outcomes; placement arrangements linked to the INTRA scheme; and quality assurance, including arrangements for external examiners and student evaluation of the programme.

The University provided examples of recently approved new programmes for the review team, which is satisfied that the University's validation and accreditation arrangements are soundly conceived and responsibly operated.

### **ASSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: SCHOOL, FACULTY, AND TOPIC REVIEW**

#### ***INTRODUCTION: GENERAL FEATURES OF DCU'S APPROACH TO INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW***

The University operates distinctive quality review processes for its academic and research units and for its administrative, learning support and student services units. In 2008, it introduced a University-wide thematic review process, "Topic Review", to enable it to look at how features of its work that affect the whole institution are functioning (see below).

DCU's internal review processes are designed on common principles that mesh with the requirements of the Universities Act (1997). They include the following:

- production by the unit under review of a self-assessment report to a centrally provided template to inform the work of a review panel (see below);
- review by a panel of peers, the composition of which includes suitably qualified external peers;
- a review visit, in which the reviewing panel meets senior members of the University and the managers, staff and students linked to the unit under review;
- a formal report to the University on the findings and recommendations of the review panel that is checked by the unit under review for factual accuracy and published on the Quality Promotion Unit page of the University web site. Published reports include a response from the University on behalf of the unit reviewed;
- a quality improvement plan (QIP) in response to the recommendations of the review report, drawn up by the leaders of the unit reviewed, with access to advice from two members of the review panel, one of whom must be an external member; and
- arrangements to monitor progress in implementing the QIP by the University's Quality Promotion Committee (QPC) for taught provision, by the Research Committee for Research Centres and postgraduate student provision, and by senior managers.

The Quality Promotion Committee was established in 2001 as a sub-committee of the University Executive and chaired by the Deputy President; since April 2009, it has been chaired by the Vice-President for Learning Innovation (VPLI). QPC has access to a small Quality Improvement Fund from which it can make grants up to €15,000 to initiate developments

The University's approaches to assuring the effectiveness of teaching and learning have included the development of a system of internal review processes that initially scrutinised how schools were delivering teaching and supporting learning and, more recently, how the Faculties, which had been established in their present form shortly before the 2005 institutional evaluation, were ensuring that their constituent schools and academic groups were fulfilling the University's requirements and enabling it to meet its wider obligations.

**School Reviews.** The University completed a cycle of internal reviews of its Schools in 2006-07. These were designed and conducted in conformity with national guidelines. The self-assessment report generated by each school to support this internal review process required the school to collect and analyse feedback from students on their teaching and learning experiences and data on student recruitment, progression and achievement. Likewise, the scope of the process covered the school's research activities. It also allowed the peer review panel to consider and make recommendations on modules, programmes and syllabi, and to review the comments of the external examiners linked to programmes offered through the school and how the latter had responded to those comments.

Towards the end of the first cycle of internal school reviews the University analysed the resulting reports to produce a report on "Common Themes in School Reviews". This was done partly in response to a recommendation of the 2005 Institutional Quality Review that the University analyses the outcomes of its quality review processes to identify issues and opportunities for improvement relevant to the University as a whole.

**Faculty Reviews.** As it reflected on the outcomes of its School Reviews, the University resolved not to embark on a second cycle of such reviews but to introduce two new internal quality review processes: Faculty Review and (later) "Topic Review". The intention in moving to a system of Faculty-based internal quality reviews was to consolidate the position of the Faculties in the University's internal academic and management arrangements and to reduce the number of individual reviews, thereby making the quality review process overall more manageable and efficient.

For Faculty Reviews, the University's process of School Reviews provided the template on which the process was initially based. Faculty Reviews are therefore based on a self-assessment report that draws together self-assessment reports provided by each constituent School and provides a Faculty-level capstone commentary. The review is conducted by a peer team of which a majority of the members is drawn from outside the University. Since faculties comprise a wider mix of subjects than single schools, the University constitutes the peer review team in such a way as to enable the work of each school within a faculty to be scrutinised by appropriately qualified specialists.

The first Faculty-level review was that of the Business School, which, as a single-school Faculty, was able to apply its earlier experience of School Review to the new process. The second Faculty to host a Faculty

Review was the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, which, as a multi-school Faculty, found that the process required considerable adaptation to accommodate its more complex structure. The review team was able to see the self-assessment prepared for this Faculty Review and to read the draft report. The self-assessment was detailed and candid and the draft report of the Faculty Review provided information on the progress and characteristics of each of the constituent Schools and Centres; both reports were thorough. The team found sufficient evidence to form the impression that each School had been reviewed thoroughly, as had the Faculty itself. The material for each School was sufficiently detailed so that one could form a view on the progress that had been made since each School's individual review. The draft Faculty Review report also covered Faculty-level matters.

The review team discussed the introduction of Faculty Review with members of the Faculty of Business and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing. Those who had participated in a Faculty Review were confident that it would lead to improvements in the Faculty and its constituent parts. The team commends the Dean and Faculty of Engineering and Computing for their contributions to the development of the University's Faculty Review process, and it commends the University for the thoroughness with which it undertakes its Faculty Reviews.

**Topic Reviews.** Faculty Reviews are undertaken in response to the legal requirements of the University Act, whereas the Topic Reviews that DCU has initiated are a function of the University's own enhancement strategy. The decision to introduce a cross-University review method derived partly from a recommendation of the 2005 Institutional Quality Review and partly (together with the choice of the first topics for review) from the findings of the University's own analysis of common themes in the reports of the school reviews it had conducted. The intention of these Topic Reviews was to enable the University to draw together staff and students from across the institution to explore, analyse and improve in areas of general institutional relevance. The University nominated its Topic Review process as its strategic enhancement theme for the present review and the process is discussed further in Section 4.

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**REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES: "LIGHT TOUCH" ANNUAL REVIEW;  
PERIODIC PROGRAMME REVIEWS; PROGRAMME HEALTH CHECKS**

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Until recently, the University's quality reviews of its Schools provided a form of periodic review for its taught programmes. Following the introduction of Faculty Reviews, there was no longer scope for such detailed consideration of programmes. With the introduction of the present IRIU process and its emphasis on consistency in institutional internal quality measures with Part 1 of the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (Part 1 ESG), the University decided that it needed to introduce means to review individual programmes of study. This coincided, however, with its decision to implement the Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI), which involved the development of descriptors setting out the intended learning outcomes for each taught programme. It also involved the review of more than 2,000 modules in order to develop and publish the learning outcomes for each. Sensibly, the University decided that in the immediate term, this activity, which is discussed more fully in Section 4 of this report, more than met the spirit of the requirement in Part 1 of the ESG that "Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards".

Since 2009, the University has been discussing how it will monitor and review the operation of its programmes of study. It has already decided to introduce what it refers to as “light-touch annual monitoring”. This will consist of an annual report by the Programme Board (the internal committee that oversees a programme) on a standard template. The report will require the Board to review the action taken to respond to the previous report; the continuing suitability of the programme outcomes; the programme’s structure; the adequacy of resources to deliver and support the programme; conformity to the marking criteria published in the University’s “Marks & Standards” document; and assessment outcomes. The report will also be required to describe and assess how the external examiners’ reports from the previous year have been addressed; describe recruitment to the programme; provide statistics on student progression, completion and performance; set out student feedback on the programme for the session; and describe any planned developments. This new process will be introduced with effect from the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year.

At the time of this IRIU review, the University was therefore designing a process for the five-yearly review of taught programmes and had formally agreed to develop in addition a “programme health-check process” to enable it to monitor on a regular basis how well programmes are performing, using key performance indicators rather than a more resource-intensive peer review process. The programme health-check process has the potential to be a significant initiative that will provide academic managers with the information to monitor the University’s portfolio of programmes overall, and indicate where deeper scrutiny would be worthwhile. The review team considers that for this initiative to fulfil its potential, it will require the support of a University-wide management information system that will be capable of providing “health-check” reports at least annually and, for preference, on demand.

Reflecting on the University’s quality review processes overall, the review team observed DCU’s demonstrable dedication to quality improvement through reviews and the implementation of findings through quality improvement plans. There is, however, a risk that carrying out such a wide range of reviews in parallel could outstrip the capacity of key staff in the Quality Promotion Unit, the Office of the Registrar, and the Office of the President to support them properly. The risk is that staff could have inadequate time to analyse and reflect on the findings of the reviews globally. Thus far, the University has shown flexibility and good sense in the way it has prioritised its review activities. The team recommends that it would now be advisable for DCU to analyse and coordinate its many review procedures in order to achieve a better linkage with externally-driven reviews, reduce the burden of internal and external reviews on staff, and maximize the benefits of reviews.

#### EXTERNAL EXAMINING ARRANGEMENTS

In common with other Universities in Ireland, DCU operates a well-established system of external examining, in which experienced academics employed by other higher education institutions in Ireland, or farther afield, and some practitioners, are retained by the University for each programme to report on the academic standards of the provision and the standards achieved by the students in their examinations, dissertations and other formal assessments. The University has devoted considerable effort to analysing the reports of its external examiners for cross-cutting themes and has recently streamlined its processes for collecting the reports of its external examiners by developing a web-based reporting instrument.

The review team saw a sample of external examiners' reports which confirmed that the students' achievements were comparable with those obtained by students following similar programmes in other Universities known to the external examiners. As the University moves to adopt web-based reporting for its external examiners, it may find it advisable to monitor the use of the new reporting instrument to ensure that it does not lead external examiners to provide less information of a qualitative nature than at present.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE OF STAFF

Members of DCU's Human Resources Office support and advise on recruitment to all University posts. The HR Office helps to establish the criteria for long-listing and short-listing candidates, helps arrange the interview process, attends interviews as full members of the interview panel, and ensures that the process meets all statutory and University requirements. Members of the Human Resources Office are also involved in all internal appointment and promotion exercises. DCU's Director of HR is a member of the University's Executive, the Senior Management Group and the Academic Promotions Committee.

The review team was told that the current financial crisis in Ireland and subsequent deterioration in industrial relations at national level had placed obstacles in the way of developing internal performance appraisal procedures. The University maintains ways of recognising good performance in research and teaching and learning by sponsoring awards for staff. While the team congratulates the University on the creative ways in which it has sought to show its appreciation for good performance, it recommends that the University continues to work toward introducing robust and reliable arrangements for the performance appraisal of staff.

The review team considered the arrangements the University has established to support and improve the quality of teaching and learning support offered to students, including its Learning Innovations Unit (LIU). This has played a conspicuous part in supporting the AFI and is supporting the University's Teaching Enhancement Cycle project. The latter is a "self-directed, cyclical process" to enable teaching staff to "gather feedback on their own teaching practice in order to self-evaluate and move to positive, actionable change through self-reflective exercises, gathering of evidence and engaging with teaching theory". Participation in the Teaching Enhancement Cycle is voluntary.

As the University continues to shift the emphasis of its approach to higher education from a focus on teaching to emphasise learning and learning support through, for example, the general adoption of learning outcomes, it seemed to the review team that LIU and the University will need to continue to provide support and encouragement to teaching staff if they are to adopt these new approaches. The team encourages the University and LIU to develop wider use of flexible support arrangements among members of staff for this purpose, including buddying, mentoring and other social arrangements among individuals and small groups.

### ASSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RESEARCH

DCU's research strategy is to use the resources available to it to best effect by establishing and developing a limited number of multi-disciplinary research centres that are globally competitive. The University's approach has been to focus on inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research. When making decisions about which of its research teams and centres should receive its backing, DCU's approach has been to seek widely for

external advice on the competitive merits of the various research teams and centres requesting its support, together with analyses of the impact that each of the various contending research teams and centres would likely have for Ireland's national economic and social development.

Following this approach has enabled the University to improve its research performance significantly so that the University's research income has grown from €5 million per annum in 2002 to over €46 million per annum in 2009. The University's research strategy for 2009-2014 commits it to "ensuring that multi-disciplinary research teams of critical mass, working closely with external partners, are supported on the basis of measured performance and strategic needs and that our research infrastructure investments are targeted at our unique research strengths".

As noted above, when deciding whether to support a research project internally, the University undertakes careful peer reviews of the research and competitive merits of proposals while at the same time paying close attention to the projected impact of the research on Ireland's economic and social development. Again, the review team suggests that the University make these features of its strategic approach to research better known to its Governing Authority and external stakeholders and policymakers.

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#### *STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF RESEARCH*

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The Vice-President for Research is responsible for the strategic direction of the University's research. The Director of Graduate Research, the Director of Research Support Services, and the Director of INVENT (the University's research commercialisation arm) all report to the Vice-President for Research. This is intended to facilitate co-ordination across the University's research activities.

The University measures the effectiveness of its management of research overall through performance indicators such as citation counts, invention disclosures and patents. Research proposals and bids to external funding agencies undergo a stringent internal evaluation by the University before it allows them to be submitted. As with the quality assurance of its teaching and learning support activities, the University also uses peer assessments and reviews to satisfy itself that its research centres and programmes are performing as it expects. Research undertaken within the Faculties and Schools is reviewed as part of the Faculty Review process. Additionally, individual Research Centres are subject to internal quality reviews that are organised in a manner similar to the reviews of other organisational units across the University. Four such reviews of Research Centres have taken place to date. The University's Designated Research Centres (UDRC) are subject to review by its Research Advisory Panel every three years in order to advise the Research Committee and the Academic Council whether or not they should continue to be supported as UDRCs.

In its discussions with members of the University, the review team was told that for DCU to be able to contribute to Ireland's future economic success, it will need to continue its participation in inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research (which it has strongly supported since its inception) through national and, increasingly, international collaborations. This will require funds for the travel and subsistence costs associated with national and particularly for international collaborations.

**MANAGEMENT OF THE COMMERCIALISATION OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER**

As mentioned previously, the University has established an independent associated company, DCU INVENT, to take the lead in commercialising the University's research, manage the intellectual property rights generated through research and development by its staff on its behalf, and champion technology transfer. DCU INVENT has received strong external support from Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland and aims to increase the number of inventions by University staff that are patented and licensed as a result of University work. Members of the University involved in its commercialisation and technology transfer activities who met the review team described how the specific needs of potential industrial and other external partners were taken into account when designing research projects.

At the time of this IRIU, DCU INVENT had supported 14 spin-off companies and a further 12 that had been taken into the University as "spin-ins". From the information provided by the University, it was clear to the review team that the benefits of establishing these operations was not limited to their economic impact but that they enabled the University, through its work with them, to provide undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students with valuable opportunities for work-based learning experiences, including work-based experience managed through the INTRA programme. The work of DCU INVENT on behalf of the University was considered by the team to be highly commendable and to exemplify good practice.

As noted previously, a hallmark of DCU's approach to the organisation and management of its research and transfer activities is its commitment to multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research. This has given the University a distinctive profile. Members of the University told the review team that while it was still considered necessary to target a limited number of areas of outstanding excellence for continued development, the multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach allowed it to integrate the work of other areas of the University into advanced research work. For example, staff working in Humanities were participating in the development of health science and engineering research programmes through their own research into ethical aspects of these activities.

**REVIEWS OF LEARNING SUPPORT AND OTHER SERVICE UNITS**

Under the terms of the Universities Act (1997), Universities in Ireland are required to undertake reviews of their internal support and administrative arrangements. Since 2005, the University has conducted 11 reviews of its internal services, including The Office of the President (2008) and the supporting offices and divisions of other members of the Senior Management Group. The predecessor of what is now Student Support and Development was internally reviewed in 2004. The reports of these reviews have been published on the Quality Promotion Unit web page and the IUQB Review Catalogue.

The methodology followed for each of the University's reviews of its internal support and administrative arrangements was broadly similar to that followed for the University's other internal reviews. As with its other internal review processes, the University has analysed the reports of reviews of its internal support and administrative arrangements to identify "Common Themes". A report on the findings of reviews of the University's administrative and support arrangements was published by the Quality Promotion Unit in 2006. Given the number of additional reviews published subsequently, the University might well find it worthwhile to repeat this exercise.

The review team was able to discuss the outcomes of these reviews with staff and students. It learned that, among other developments, an outcome of one of these reviews, reinforced by the first Topic Review, was the introduction of new software to enable the University's student services to manage appointments and record meetings securely.

#### THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSES TO THE FINDINGS OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEWS

Matters of quality assurance and quality enhancement are inextricably linked at DCU. The University has been diligent in its internal quality assurance procedures to identify matters that require improvement, and it has been disciplined in its approach to effecting the changes necessary to realise those improvements. It has been equally responsive to recommendations for improvements that have been called for by external reviews. Overall, quality assurance at DCU has been designed and carried out in such a way and so thoroughly that it constitutes a first step in the quality enhancement process, which is as it should be.

#### QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES DELIVERED BY LINKED COLLEGES LEADING TO DCU AWARDS

The University has three Linked Colleges – St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, The Mater Dei Institute of Education, and All Hallows College. The University and its partners view these arrangements as mutually beneficial: they extend the University's disciplinary spread, they enable students at the Linked Colleges to study for University awards, and staff both of the University and the Linked Colleges have much greater opportunity to work together. Cooperation between the Linked Colleges and DCU includes taught postgraduate and research programmes.

St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, a college of education and humanities, is the largest provider of programmes for primary school teachers in Ireland and its affiliation with DCU dates from 1993. The formal arrangements between the two institutions treat the College for planning and academic purposes as a Faculty of the University. The Mater Dei Institute is also a teacher education institution with a focus on educating and training teachers of religious studies and humanities; it has been affiliated with DCU since 1999. Both St. Patrick's and The Mater Dei Institute receive their public funding through the University and both are fully compliant with the Universities Act and aligned with European Standards and Guidelines. All Hallows College's affiliation with the University stems from 1998, having been further consolidated in 2008. All Hallows is not publicly funded and is therefore not subject to the same compliance requirements as DCU and the other Linked Colleges. However, the review team learned that All Hallows has worked hard and successfully to come into voluntary compliance with the provisions of the Universities Act and that it was presently completing the realignment of its regulations, policies and practices with those of the University where this is necessary and appropriate.

While two of the University's Linked Colleges (SPD and MDI) have their own Quality Promotion Committees, the Linked Colleges all participate in DCU's quality assurance arrangements under the auspices of the University's Education Committee and its Validation Sub-committee. The Linked Colleges engage in the same regular reviews of programmes as academic units within the University, and the final approval of new programmes and awards is subject to approval by the University. All three of the Linked Colleges have been fully involved in the introduction of the AFI and all are working to develop procedures for measuring student learning outcomes. The Linked Colleges are also engaged with DCU's Learning Innovation Unit and with

Oscail, the former national centre for distance learning that has now been brought within the University, in developing online learning programmes. The review team learned that from the current academic session, researchers in the Linked Colleges are eligible to compete for DCU President's Research Awards. The team is confident that the quality and other formal arrangements which the University has made with the Linked Colleges has enabled them to participate fully in, and benefit from, its quality assurance and quality enhancement work.

### **MANAGEMENT INFORMATION TO INFORM THE OPERATION AND EVALUATION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S QUALITY MONITORING AND REVIEW ACTIVITIES**

The contribution of the Institutional Research and Analysis Officer to the process of completing the ISAR has been described in Sections 1 and 2, above. More generally, the review team discussed the University's access to and use of data, information and analytical materials for management during the main review visit.

The review team heard that Heads of Schools and Deans of Faculties could call on the services of the Institutional Research and Analysis Officer to provide them with bespoke reports to support their management. Being able to call on this Officer to undertake such bespoke work clearly provides DCU's academic managers with valuable snapshots of aspects of its activities. This facility is not, however, a sustainable alternative to the development of a system of regular reports produced from a dedicated academic management information system. The present arrangement must also constrain the valuable contributions that the Institutional Research and Analysis Officer can make to the University's more general development through her researches. The team therefore recommends that, as part of its commitment to improvement, the University should develop comprehensive management information systems to support the work of the President, the Senior Management Group, the University Executive, Heads of Schools, Deans of Faculties and other senior academic and support services managers. Such a system is also essential if the University is to carry out its intention to introduce programme "health checks".

### **MANAGING PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT QUALITY, INCLUDING THE LINKAGE WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEW ACTIVITIES**

In line with their statutory obligations under the Universities Act (1997) and as part of the underpinnings for the IRIU and other quality processes supported by IUQB and the HEA, Universities in Ireland publish reports of the internal reviews that they conduct, often via their institutional web sites. The purpose of this is to inform the public and stakeholders of how quality is being assured in higher education in Ireland and to show that they are complying with the 1997 Act.

DCU has published a substantial number of the reports of its internal reviews although occasionally publication has been a considerable time after the completion of the relevant review. In the present circumstances, where stakeholders and the public at large have expressed concerns about the quality and academic standards of higher education in Ireland, the University would be wise to provide more, and more timely, evidence to stakeholders and the public of the thoroughness with which it reviews its internal activities and of its work to secure quality and standards.

### EXTERNAL REVIEWS AND ACCREDITATION

In addition to its own internal reviews, many of the University's programmes are subject to external review/ accreditation by professional bodies such as Engineers Ireland.

### COMMENDATIONS

The review team commends...

- 3.1 the University for the thoroughness with which it undertakes its Faculty Reviews, and the Dean and Faculty of Engineering and Computing for their contributions to the development of the University's Faculty Review process.
- 3.2 the University on the creative ways in which it has sought to show its appreciation for good performance.
- 3.3 the work of DCU INVENT on behalf of the University, which exemplifies good practice in matters of technology transfer and the commercialisation of University research.
- 3.4 the quality and other formal arrangements the University has made with its Linked Colleges, which has enabled them to participate in, and benefit from, its quality assurance and quality enhancement work.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The review team recommends that the University...

- 3.4 develops and supports an institution-wide management information system that will be capable of providing "health-check" reports at least annually and, for preference, on demand, and to support the work of managers and committees across the institution.
- 3.5 analyses and co-ordinates its many internal quality review procedures in order to achieve a better linkage with externally-driven reviews, reduce the burden of internal and external reviews on staff, and maximize their benefits to the University.

## SECTION 4

## QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

**THE INTRODUCTION: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT**

The University's quality assurance arrangements have been designed to lead to quality improvement, as well as to provide accountability, through the requirement that each report of an internal review process leads into a "Quality Improvement Plan" (QIP). This emphasis on quality improvement has contributed to the creation of a "quality culture" within the University that has reduced the risk of quality assurance being regarded as an external imposition rather than an essential constituent of professionalism in teaching, learning, research, management and administration.

DCU has carefully analysed its activities in order to identify matters for improvement and has addressed them diligently. The University has been responsive to recommendations for improvements that have been recommended by external reviews.

**ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT*****THE ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR INNOVATION***

Since 2007-08, the University has been engaged in a long-term, intensive, institution-wide project designed to "achieve deep curriculum transformation, align all [the University's] programmes with the NFQ [and] provide flexible pathways and increased choice for students". As noted in Section 3 above, this has required the development of programme descriptors for all taught programmes and the revision of all taught modules to update their contents and to incorporate learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria.

The review team was able to discuss the design and management of this impressive project with staff at all levels in the University and its Linked Colleges. It learned that the project had largely been implemented through the development of a project team led overall by a senior academic acting as Director and in each Faculty by the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning. At Faculty level, the Associate Deans were supported by specially appointed seconded staff to act as "Academic Framework for Innovation Fellows" (AFI Fellows). From 2010, the Vice-President for Learning Innovation is to take over the direction of the next stages of the AFI project.

The principal objectives of the AFI project for 2008-09 were described in the ISAR as "meeting the requirements of the NFQ and Bologna" and, for 2008-10, "developing the foundations for a new academic framework". Among other matters, this involved the revision of the University's assessment framework and criteria and the introduction of new programme management procedures and policies. From 2009, the University has also been working on the improvement of software support systems for its modular provision, including linking them with its broader management information systems, integrating its timetabling arrangements for teaching and examination, and developing online admissions, registration and academic record-keeping systems.

The evidence available to the review team suggests that the overall design of the AFI project was well conceived and that to date it has been no less well managed. As this project reaches maturity, the challenge for the University will be to ensure that all staff integrate its principles and procedures into all aspects of their work, and that the entire University community supports the project. The team considers that full implementation of the AFI will provide the University with a distinctive and defining approach to higher education, enabling it to shift the emphasis in its academic work from a pedagogy that focuses principally on teaching to one in which learning is the focus. In the view of the team, that shift is to be vigorously encouraged for the benefit of students and is likely to benefit the University's reputation as a student-centred institution more widely as well.

In the near future, the University intends to broaden the scope of the training for academic, support and administrative staff it has so far provided on the AFI and to hold debates and seminars on the key concepts underlying its introduction and development. It has also made provision for the support of teaching and learning initiatives in these and other areas through its Learning Innovation Fund (LIF). The Learning Innovation Unit (LIU) also publishes a review, "Teaching Reflections", the first issue of which was published in February 2010.

The review team commends the University for its wisdom and foresight in conceiving the Academic Framework for Innovation project and for the manner in which the project's implementation has been managed. The team also commends the University for the dedication and energy with which its staff have developed programme descriptors, revised its stock of taught modules and developed learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria for them. The University's Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, its AFI Fellows and the LIU are to be commended for their outstanding contribution to implementing the AFI project across the University. The University's plans for further work to deepen understanding of the concepts underlying the AFI and its development are also to be commended. The team agrees with the University that support for the continuing development of the AFI should be seen as a priority.

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#### TOPIC REVIEW

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The University undertook its first Topic Review of provision for and experience of the University's first-year students in 2008, and its second Topic Review of its arrangements for postgraduate research students (including training for undertaking research) in 2009. The methodology for Topic Reviews has been derived from the *Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* (2nd edition), developed and published jointly by the IUQB and the IUA. For Topic Reviews, the self-assessment report is compiled by a "Review Committee", the membership of which is chosen to reflect and represent the parties across the University involved in the topic to be reviewed. Thereafter, the Topic Review process broadly follows the University's general pattern for internal reviews, including the production of a Report and a Quality Improvement Plan. Summaries of the reports of Topic Reviews, the Quality Improvement Plan and the University's response are provided to the Governing Authority, which may choose to publish the findings of the Topic Review. Unlike the reports of reviews of departments and support services, there is no statutory requirement that the University publish the reports of Topic Reviews.

The review team was able to meet with staff and students who had contributed to the two Topic Reviews conducted to date and to discuss their findings. The team concluded that Topic Reviews were

a commendable development by the University. It also found that the two Topic Reviews that had been undertaken were making a significant contribution to the improvement of University-wide arrangements for first-year students and postgraduate research students, having led, among other developments, to the establishment of a Student Experience Committee. It is the review team's view that Topic Reviews have potential for wider application in other higher education institutions in Ireland and beyond, and the University is to be commended for its development of this process.

### THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A corollary of the University's strategic decision through the AFI to move from an emphasis on teaching to emphasise learning is its commitment to "student-centredness". This is evident in the extent to which DCU has sought to involve its students in its internal quality reviews, its formulation of learning outcomes, and its determination to set out what is distinctive about the DCU student experience through its developing "Graduate Profile" project.

The University's "student-centredness" is also evident in its commendable decision to make students and their experience the subjects of its first two Topic Reviews.

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### INTEGRATED TRAINING

In the early 1980s, DCU's predecessor, NIHE Dublin, pioneered a programme of credit-granting, work-based placements for undergraduate students that it designated INTRA (for InTegrated Training). DCU continues to support INTRA, which, together with the University's research and business partnerships, has helped to earn the University a reputation for being "business and industry friendly". Undergraduate students, especially those in the sciences and engineering, are typically placed in a work environment in a business, industry or research laboratory during their pre-final year. Described as "action learning", this experience provides a research component for students and it also produces valuable feedback, in that the INTRA Office conducts evaluations of the students' experiences based on feedback from employers. Students who met the review team value the INTRA programme and were disappointed that opportunities for some humanities and social sciences to participate in INTRA were now being withdrawn. They pointed out that students in social sciences and humanities need INTRA opportunities to help them to gain employment after graduation, as much if not more than sciences and engineering students.

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### FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS ON THEIR ASSESSED WORK; FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS ON THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

An important aspect of student-centred learning is a commitment on the part of the institution and its staff to provide timely feedback to students on their assessed work and to seek feedback from students on their learning experiences. The review team noted that the University's researches in preparation for compiling the ISAR, including its focus group studies, had shown that students considered that the feedback they received from teaching staff on their assessments and other examinations was sometimes tardy and that they would also welcome wider opportunities to provide feedback to staff on their learning experiences. Students who met the team confirmed these points. The review team recommends that the University develops and adopts a more consistent approach to providing feedback to students on their work and that it conveys to its staff

that the provision of timely feedback to students on their assessed work should be seen as a requirement. The University receives feedback from students on their learning experiences through a system of student representation at programme level and within schools and, at Faculty and University level, through the officers of the Students' Union. Students' representatives had participated fully in the preparation of the ISAR and had assisted the University in identifying student participants to attend the focus group meetings that were convened.

The University's institutional research programme has enabled it to recognise the value of receiving timely feedback from students on their learning experiences. Drawing on the experience of universities outside Ireland, it has developed a web page, "Your Voice. Heard", through which students can report difficulties and suggest improvements without waiting for more formal feedback opportunities such as end-of-year questionnaires or focus group meetings. The web page also provides a channel through which the University can report back to students on what it has done to respond to their points. Students who met the review team knew about "Your Voice. Heard" and some had used it.

Since 2006, in order to achieve greater levels of student involvement and student feedback, the Quality Promotion Unit, in co-operation with the Students' Union, has organised an annual Student Quality Forum (Student ForQ). Reports of the proceedings of ForQ are published annually in October on the DCU web site.

The team recommends the development and introduction of further ways for students to provide feedback on their experience with the work of tutors, supervisors and other teaching staff, and that the University should continue to explore further opportunities for student representation in co-operation with the Students' Union.

#### PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF STAFF

In 2005, the EUA Institutional Quality Review recommended that DCU "explore available options for implementing a robust system of performance appraisal". The ISAR described the University's Performance Management and Development Scheme for staff, noting that it had had only limited success. The ISAR ascribed its difficulties to wider difficulties in Ireland with joint Government and union initiatives that had been adversely affected by present economic circumstances. Nevertheless, a robust system of performance appraisal is not only a mandatory requirement but essential to the implementation of a soundly-based quality assurance programme and the review team recommends that the University re-addresses itself to developing and implementing such a system.

The University has had some success in developing a "Teaching Enhancement Cycle", comprising a "mixture of teaching quality instruments including student feedback, teaching portfolios, peer review, mentoring, micro-teaching, and other instruments designed to help academic staff improve their performance as teachers". The Teaching Enhancement Cycle has been piloted within the University by the Faculty of Business. At the time of this review the University had yet to analyse the outcomes of the pilot project but its intention was to undertake that analysis, modify the design of the Teaching Enhancement Cycle in the light of its conclusions, and roll out the Teaching Enhancement Cycle across the institution as soon as possible.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDIES

Partly in response to recommendations of the 2005 Institutional Evaluation Report, DCU has introduced new types of doctoral study, including a structured PhD programme and a professional doctorate pathway. These have required revisions to the University's regulations, which were under way at the time of this review.

Across the University, the number of PhD students researching towards its awards has increased substantially since the 2005 Institutional Evaluation and the University is committed to further increases. Members of the University told the review team that the University was adapting its internal arrangements to support larger numbers of postgraduate research students and that DCU had adopted and was intent on following the good practice guidelines for "The Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education" published by IUQB in 2009.

In the course of its visit to the University, the review team was able to discuss with postgraduate research students DCU's support and supervisory arrangements for them. Almost all were keen to express their enthusiasm for the research they were undertaking. Again, almost all expressed satisfaction with the supervision and support they had received. Some concerns were expressed to the team, however, which was surprised to learn that the practice of a supervisory team for PhD students could mean that while an academic of the University is the supervisor, some guidance may be given by post-doctoral researchers. The University should make sure that its research students are aware that formal supervision may only be given by official supervisors.

From its discussions with members of the University and postgraduate research students, the review team noted that research students frequently provided some form of tuition for undergraduate students and, for many, this took the form of acting as a laboratory demonstrator. Most of the research students with whom the team discussed this matter were pleased to have the opportunity to teach undergraduate students but some considered that they had received insufficient induction and support to prepare them for demonstrating or teaching. Several postgraduate research students expressed frustration that as they drew near to preparing their thesis for submission, they had been required to divert their attention to their demonstration duties. The team recommends that the University consider carefully the practice of assigning laboratory supervision to PhD students, particularly during the culminating period of their studies.

The review team also noted that none of the PhD students it met professed to know how they might change their supervisor if the supervisory relationship should deteriorate. The team recommends that the University continues to develop its support arrangements of its postgraduate research students and be more proactive in ensuring that research students and supervisors are aware of the published academic regulations on the supervisory relationship and how research students may change supervisors.

### THE UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT TO MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

University statistics produced as part of the ISAR show that DCU's overall institutional research performance has increased very substantially since the University's foundation. Since 1997, the University has undertaken two major reviews of its strategies and policies for research development. The first of these enabled it to identify those areas of its research where internal and external support could enable them to be globally

competitive. The second, in 2008, led to the publication of the “DCU Foresight Report: Managing our destiny in uncertain times...” (The Foresight Report). This constituted a multi-disciplinary analysis undertaken by the University of the challenges, options and opportunities it faced in the coming years and was designed to provide a basis for strategic planning in research, in the commercialisation of research, and in learning and teaching. From the papers the review team saw and from its discussions with members of the University, it was apparent that over a long period the University has devoted much thought and care to the development of its research strategy and to integrating that strategy with its approach to meeting national economic and social needs, to supporting learning and teaching, and to meeting its civic responsibilities.

The team considers that a precondition of success in supporting research and spin-off activities is that universities and their funding agencies be prepared to take the “long view”, recognising that projects may require many years (in some cases decades) before returns can be expected. In view of the external context within which the University was working at the time of this review, the team suggests that it takes steps to brief the Governing Authority and external stakeholders and policymakers on the likely consequences of cutting the funding for long-term University research and development in terms of future employment and national economic success.

Reflecting on the University’s distinctive commitment to multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research, and that such research necessarily involves higher costs than single-discipline research, the review team suggests that the University takes steps to make external funding agencies and stakeholders more aware of the very positive features of its research strategy, in order to alert them to the need for funding schemes not to penalise bids for the support of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research.

## THE ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENT SUPPORT

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### ACADEMIC GUIDANCE

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In the years immediately before this review, the number of DCU’s taught students had increased considerably, creating increased demands from students for academic guidance and advice. The need for such guidance and advice is likely to increase as the Academic Framework for Innovation matures and enables students to choose more flexible learning paths. This increased demand from students is also likely to affect the University’s Disability Learning Support Services, its counselling, personal development, and career guidance services, as well as its support arrangements for international students.

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### SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH PARTICULAR NEEDS

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Since 2005, the University has worked steadily to improve access to its higher education provision for non-standard students (including mature students and those from families with little previous experience of higher education). The success of the University in this work testifies to the contribution made by its student support services. DCU is, nonetheless, aware of the need to provide additional, more proactive learning support for non-standard students and that such support assists not only those receiving it directly but ensures a better learning experience for those studying alongside them.

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**SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

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Since 2005, the University has strongly promoted its taught programmes and opportunities for postgraduate research to international students. In 2004-05, 1,300 international students were studying or researching at the University. In 2009-10, this had risen to more than 1,800 international students, although this figure represented a modest decline from a peak of 2,038 international students in 2008-09. The University is committed to the continuing internationalisation of its work and the recruitment of international students. The review team discussed the University's present arrangements for the support of its international students with staff and students. It noted that the University provided only limited assistance with accommodation for international students on their arrival in Ireland and that the effectiveness of induction arrangements for research students could vary between schools and individual supervisors. In view of the importance the University attaches to recruiting international students (and particularly international research students), the team recommends that the University seeks ways to improve its support for international students on arrival and to provide them with better induction and support and guidance as a matter of routine rather than on referral or self-referral.

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**THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS**

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The development of DCU's Glasnevin campus has taken place as funds have become available to the University. This has meant that for some years the development of the University's campus facilities lagged behind the growth of its taught and research postgraduate student body. Although the review team was able to see several areas where the University had redeveloped buildings formerly considered unsuitable, the consequences of the growth of its student body outstripping its campus facilities were apparent from the reports of the outcomes of the student focus groups the University had convened as part of its institutional self-assessment. These made it plain that for some time the University had organised its facilities as if its student body was studying from 9 to 5 on weekdays and during timetabled sessions, at a time when DCU was actively recruiting part-time and flexible learning students and postgraduate researchers working throughout the year.

Senior members of staff told the review team that the availability of catering and other facilities, including Registry services, was being redesigned to suit the needs of students following flexible patterns of study and research postgraduate students. The University is to be congratulated for the rapid and positive way in which it has responded to feedback from its students and the outcomes of focus group meetings. Students who met the review team had yet to see the benefit of all these measures and therefore the team urges the University to be more active in briefing students on the measures it is taking to adapt its campus facilities to new patterns of study and the needs of postgraduate researchers, and to developing a "24/7" campus environment. The University shared with the team the extensive schedule of improvements to its campus that it considered necessary but which were now on hold as the institution adapted to its reduced financial circumstances. The review team encourages the University to continue to develop and update the schedule of improvements to its campus, and that these improvements are prioritised in accordance with the University's mission and strategic plans.

The changing character of the University's student body is likely to necessitate the expansion of DCU's student support services. The review team therefore welcomes the University's work to develop an online guidance tool for students, its introduction of online registration for taught students, and the introduction of online application procedures for postgraduate taught programmes. At the time of this review, the University was also developing an online research application system, seeking to increase the use of (and support for) its open source Virtual Learning Environment "Moodle" through staff training and workshops, and identifying further opportunities for the development of online services, such as the production of an electronic transcript.

DCU has made a commendable effort to listen to its students and to be a "student-centred" university. It has faced challenges, however, in finding the resources to maintain various areas of student support commensurate with its growth in enrolment and in the diversity of its student body.

### AFTERWORD

In this "Age of Accountability", it will be increasingly important for the University to communicate the advantages and achievements of its quality assurance and quality enhancement activities, both externally and internally. Communication internally is important to enhance the understanding of the Governing Authority about this work, and to maintain the morale of its staff and students. One way in which this can be undertaken is by ensuring that the Governing Authority, staff and students understand the University's achievements and successes and, perhaps more important, the external limitations imposed on it that prevent significant increases in funding for Schools, services, Centres and Faculties that have been reviewed, regardless of the merits of proposals.

It is the view of the review team that the University should communicate to external stakeholders and policymakers its successes in its quality assurance and quality enhancement activities to date, and particularly the boldness of vision represented by the AFI, which the University, wisely in the view of the team, considers a priority for its future development. The publication of explanatory papers on this and other aspects of the University's work, written for lay readers, would assist the University in providing external stakeholders and policymakers with evidence that DCU is safeguarding the quality of students' learning and that it is demonstrably safeguarding the academic standards of its students' achievements and the University's academic awards.

### COMMENDATIONS

The review team commends the University for...

- 4.1 its wisdom and foresight in conceiving the Academic Framework for Innovation project, for the manner in which the project's implementation has been managed, and for its plans for work further with staff and students to deepen understanding of the concepts underlying the AFI.
- 4.2 the dedication and energy with which its staff have supported the AFI through developing programme descriptors, revising DCU's stock of taught modules and developing learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria for modules.
- 4.3 the outstanding contribution of Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, the AFI Fellows and the LIU for implementing the AFI project across the University.

- 4.4 the development and application of Topic Reviews as a quality assurance and quality enhancement process that has potential for wider application in other higher education institutions in Ireland and beyond.
- 4.5 its determination to be student-centred in its work, as seen in its drive to emphasise learning and learning support through the AFI and its identification of student-related topics for its first two Topic Reviews.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The review team recommends that the University...

- 4.6 develops and adopts a more consistent approach to providing feedback to students on their work and that it conveys to its staff that the provision of timely feedback to students on their assessed work is a requirement.
- 4.7 develops and introduces further ways for students to provide feedback on their experience with tutors, supervisors and other teaching staff and continues to explore further opportunities for student representation in co-operation with the Students' Union.
- 4.8 considers carefully the practice of assigning laboratory supervision to PhD students during the culminating period of their studies.
- 4.9 continues to develop its support arrangements for postgraduate research students and is more proactive in ensuring that students and supervisors are fully aware of the published academic regulations on the supervisory relationship and of how changes of supervisors may be implemented.
- 4.10 develops and implements a robust performance appraisal system for staff.
- 4.11 improves its support for international students on their arrival in Ireland and arranges to provide them with better induction support and guidance as a matter of routine rather than on referral or self-referral.

## SECTION 5

## COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 35 OF THE UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997 AND CONSISTENCY WITH THE PART 1 ESG

### COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The statutory requirements for quality assurance processes of Irish universities are presented in The Universities Act 1997 and they can be summarised as follows:

- Regular evaluation (not less than once every ten years) of each department and, where appropriate, faculty and any service provided by the University by persons competent to make national and international comparisons;
- Regular assessment—including by students—of the teaching, research and other services provided by the University;
- Publication of findings of reviews;
- Implementation of findings arising from reviews, providing the resources are available, and the findings are reasonable and practical.

From the evidence provided by the University and its discussions with members of staff and students, the review team is confident that Dublin City University is complying with each of the above statutory requirements.

- The University has undertaken one complete cycle of reviews of its Schools and has begun a second cycle of reviews that incorporate school-level reporting within Faculty review reports. In all cases, membership of review teams has included external peers to enable the teams to make national and international comparisons. Reports from reviews are made available to the Governing Authority and full reports are published by the University on the Quality Promotion Unit web page and separately through the IUQB Reviews Catalogue.
- The University undertakes regular reviews of its research and the administrative and support services it provides for students and others. Reviews are conducted by peer groups, the membership of which includes external peers in order to enable the groups to make national and international comparisons. Summaries of the reports and findings of these reviews are made available to the Governing Authority and, again, full versions are published through the Quality Promotion Unit and on the University's web site.
- The University seeks student assessments of their experiences of teaching and learning on a regular basis through questionnaires, focus groups and student representation on the Programme Boards that oversee programmes of study. The University's internal review processes provide for peer groups undertaking reviews to meet undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students and alumni (the

latter where possible) in order to gather evidence from them about the teaching and support provided by the University.

- The review team considers that there is abundant evidence that Dublin City University pays careful attention to the findings and recommendations of internal and external reviews of its work and arrangements and that where it is reasonable, affordable and practicable to implement the recommendations, it does so.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH PART ONE ESG**

The review team is satisfied that the University has carefully reviewed its quality and standards and quality enhancement arrangements against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines, Part 1).

The University has established for itself that it will need to introduce procedures for the annual monitoring of programmes and for their periodic review (ESG 1.2). The review team is satisfied that the University's plans to address these matters are well advanced and should enable it to be fully consistent with this aspect of the advice of Part 1 the "Standards and Guidelines" within less than a year. Further work is needed to enable the University to satisfy itself, through performance appraisal arrangements, that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so (ESG 1.4).

In all other respects, the review team finds that the University's quality arrangements are fully consistent with Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines.

### **ENGAGEMENT WITH NATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE**

The review team found evidence that the University was gathering information on national, European and international good practice through horizon scanning and the attendance of its staff at national and international conferences, seminars and workshops.

## SECTION 6

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the Review Team's evaluation of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report, supporting documentation and meetings conducted during the Main Review Visit, the Team found sufficient evidence to confirm:

CATEGORY:	KEY REVIEWER FINDINGS
Statutory Requirements	<b>The Review Team found that the University's activities comply with statutory requirements.</b>
European Standards	<b>The Review Team found the University's quality assurance arrangements to be satisfactorily consistent with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).</b>
National, European and International Best Practice	<b>The University is taking account of national, European and international best practice.</b>

The Team found sufficient evidence to commend the following examples of good practice for further promotion internally, nationally and internationally:

6.1	The way in which the University has embedded a quality culture that permeates the institution and its work;
6.2	Its development of "common themes" in the outcomes of its internal reviews;
6.3	The level and extent of cross-institutional participation throughout the process of self-assessment and compiling the ISAR, the conscientiousness of its preparation and its clarity and candour;
6.4	The process of preparing the ISAR, which has been a quality enhancement measure in itself that has made a significant contribution to the University's quality culture;
6.5	The thoroughness with which the University undertakes its Faculty Reviews, and the contributions to the development of the University's Faculty Review process by the Dean and Faculty of Engineering and Computing;
6.6	The work of DCU INVENT on behalf of the University, which exemplifies good practice in matters of technology transfer and the commercialisation of University research;
6.7	The University's wisdom and foresight in conceiving the Academic Framework for Innovation project, for the manner in which the project's implementation has been managed, and for its plans for further work with staff and students to deepen understanding of the concepts underlying the AFI;
6.8	The dedication and energy with which staff have supported the AFI through developing programme descriptors, revising DCU's stock of taught modules and developing learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria for modules;
6.9	The work of the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, the AFI Fellows and the LIU for their outstanding contribution to implementing the AFI project across the University;

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|------|---|
| 6.10 | The development and application of Topic Reviews as a quality assurance and quality enhancement process that has potential for wider applications in other higher education institutions in Ireland and beyond. |
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The Team found sufficient evidence to recommend the following activities to the University for attention and development:

6.11	Establish a “standing committee” of the Governing Authority, drawn from its external members, to be convened between meetings of the full Governing Authority, and that it seeks opportunities for external members of the Governing Authority to become more closely acquainted with the University’s work;
6.12	Continue efforts to synchronise the internal review cycle and strategic planning cycle;
6.13	Develop an institution-wide management information system to support the work of academic managers and committees across the University;
6.14	Analyse and co-ordinate the many internal quality review procedures in order to achieve a better linkage with externally-driven reviews, to reduce the burden of internal and external reviews on staff, and to maximize their benefits to the University;
6.15	Develop and adopt a more consistent approach to providing feedback to students on their work and convey to staff that the provision of timely feedback to students on their assessed work is a requirement;
6.16	Develop and introduce further ways for students to provide feedback on their experience with tutors, supervisors and other teaching staff and continue to explore further opportunities for student representation in co-operation with the Students’ Union;
6.17	Consider carefully the practice of assigning laboratory supervision to PhD students during the culminating period of their studies;
6.18	Continue to develop support arrangements for postgraduate research students and ensure that students and supervisors are fully aware of the published academic regulations on the supervisory relationship, and of how changes of supervisors may be implemented;
6.19	Develop and implement a robust performance appraisal system for staff;
6.20	Improve support for international students on their arrival in Ireland and arrange to provide them with better induction support and guidance as a matter of routine.



The logo for IRIU (International Research Institute for University Studies) is a watermark in the top right corner. It features the letters 'IRIU' in a serif font, with a stylized graphic of three curved lines forming a triangle around the letters. There are also three small circles scattered around the graphic.

IRIU

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

#### SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2010

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
18:00	Review Team	Private meeting
20:00	Review Team & DCU Senior Management Team	Discussion of the key issues to be explored during the visit

#### DAY 1: MONDAY 1 MARCH 2010 (ALL MEETINGS HELD IN ROOM D404, OSCAIL BUILDING, DCU)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
09:00 – 09:30	Review Team & IC	Private time to enable the team to set up and discuss issues for the day and prepare for the first meeting with the DCU President
09:30 – 10:00	President	Private discussion with the President
10:00 – 11:00	Steering Committee members	Discussion on the institutional approach to IRIU and the Self-Assessment process, including a discussion on how the university responded to the findings of the first institutional review
11:00 – 11:15	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead
11:15 – 12:15	Directors of student support services	Meetings with Directors of a range of student services – including a visit to a few student services
12:15 – 13:00	HR representatives	Session on staffing issues – promotions process for academic and non-academic staff and a discussion around staff numbers – diversity and flexibility in staffing and recruitment etc.
13:00 – 13:30	Review Team (LUNCH)	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead
13:30 – 14:30	Governing Authority representatives	Discussion of the mechanisms employed by the Governing Authority for quality assurance and enhancement within the University in line with the Universities Act requirements
14:30 – 14:45	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead

## MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

14:45 – 15:45	Education Committee Members	To discuss the committee structure and the processes employed for managing the quality culture and ensuring its effectiveness within DCU	
15:45 – 16:00	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead	
16:00 – 16:45	Focus Groups	Group 1 – <u>Members:</u> Staff – academic and non-academic	Group 2: <u>Facilitators</u>
16:45 – 17:45	Review Team	Private discussion to exchange first impressions and identify key findings, commendations and recommendations from Day 1. Also to assist in preparations for the meetings to be undertaken on Tuesday 2 March	
20:00 – 22:00	Review Team	Private Dinner	

### DAY 2: TUESDAY 2 MARCH 2010 (ALL MEETINGS HELD IN ROOM D404, OSCAIL BUILDING, DCU)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
09:00 – 09:30	Review Team & IC	Meeting between the IC, C and CR to clarify issues from Day 1 that might impact on Day 2
09:30 – 10:15	Deans	To discuss the roles of Deans in the management of quality assurance and strategic planning within DCU and their engagement with QA processes and outcomes
10:30 – 11:15	Associate Deans (AFI)	To discuss the role of Associate Deans in quality management and their role in the university-wide teaching and learning and the Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI)
11:15 – 11:45	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead
11:45 – 12:45	Senior Management Team	To discuss institutional mission, goals, strategic aims, direction and recent and proposed developments in quality management and its link to strategic planning
12:45 – 13:30	Review Team (LUNCH)	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead
13:30 – 14:30	DCU staff linked to Enhancement Theme	Discussion of the Quality Enhancement Theme – outlining progress on the topic by the University – the proposed direction of travel alongside aspects that the views of the team are requested upon.

# APPENDIX 1

## MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

14: 30– 15:30 <b>(SPLIT SESSION)</b>	Students	Group 1: Students' Union Sabbatical Officers	Group 2: Undergraduate students - including those that engaged with recent reviews, the Student Forum on Quality and the First Year experience Thematic/Topic Review
15:30 – 16:00	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead	
16:00 – 16:45	Quality Promotion Committee & Student Experience Committee members	Meet with committee members to discuss the roles and the effectiveness of the committee structure in relation to QA practices, strategic planning, decision-making and the implementation and communication (with staff and students) of the outcomes of QA	
16:45 – 17:15	Review Team	Private discussion to exchange first impressions and identify key findings, commendations and recommendations from Day 2. Also to assist in preparations for the meetings to be undertaken on Wednesday 3 March – allocating questions per meeting, agreeing an order of questioning and outlining the key requirements of each session etc.	
20:00 – 22:00	Review Team	Private Dinner	

### DAY 3: WEDNESDAY 3 MARCH 2010 (ALL MEETINGS HELD IN ROOM D404, OSCAIL BUILDING, DCU)

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
09:00 – 09:30	Review Team & IC	Private meeting between the IC, C and CR to clarify issues from Day 2 that might impact on Day 3
09:30 – 10:45	Research Centre Directors & Dean of Graduate Research	To discuss the development of research in DCU, research centres, recent centre reviews and support for research active staff and the PG research experience
10:45 – 11:00	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead
11:00 – 11:30	Review Team & President Designate	Private discussion with the President Designate (due to take office in July 2010)
11:35 – 11:45	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead

## MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

11:45 – 12:30 <b>(SPLIT SESSIONS)</b>	Meeting with Staff who have engaged with DCU review processes	Group 1 - Academic Staff that recently engaged with academic and common theme reviews	Group 2 - Non-Academic Staff that recently engaged with Admin/Support and common theme reviews
12:30 – 13:15	Review Team (LUNCH)	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead	
13:15 – 14:00	Postgraduate and Post Doc Researchers	Group 1 - Masters and PhD Students	Group 2 - Post Doc Researchers
14:15 – 15:15	Link College Representatives	Discussions with colleagues from The Mater Dei Institute of Education, All Hallows College, and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, on how linked colleges and the staff and students within the colleges engage with DCU formally and informally - including matters of governance, quality etc.	
15:15 – 15:45	Review Team	Private time to reflect on the meetings undertaken and prepare for the meetings ahead	
15:45 – 16:45	OPEN SLOT	OPEN SLOT to be utilised by DCU or the Review Team if needed	
16:45 – 17:45	Review Team	Private discussion to exchange first impressions and identify key findings, commendations and recommendations from Day 3. Also to agree amongst the team that all aspects of the report have been fully covered in advance of preparations for the oral report to be given on Thursday 4 March.	
20:00 – 22:00	Review Team	Private Dinner	

### **DAY 4: THURSDAY 4 MARCH 2010 (ALL MEETINGS HELD IN ROOM D404, OSCAIL BUILDING, DCU)**

TIME	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
09:00 – 09:30	Review Team	Private meeting between the IC, C and CR to clarify issues that need to be taken into account
09:30 – 11:30 <b>(Parallel)</b>	Review Team	Preparation for Exit Presentation
10:00 – 11:00 <b>(Parallel)</b>	IC & IUQB Quality Reviews Manager (meet in IC's office)	Parallel meeting to enable the institution to give feedback to the IUQB on the conduct of the review team and feedback on their experience of the process. Clarification on the post-visit process will be provided

# APPENDIX 1

## MAIN REVIEW VISIT - TIMETABLE

11:00 – 12:15	Review Team & IUQB Quality Reviews Manager	Meeting to enable the Chair and the team to rehearse the powerpoint presentation and confirm the key findings and the experiences of the team with the IUQB Reviews Manager
12:15 – 13.00	Review Team, IUQB Quality Reviews Manager, the Senior Management Team/ Steering Group	Oral Report - Chair gives an oral presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the review team and confirms actions and timescales associated with the finalising and publication of the reports and any follow-up actions – CONFIDENTIAL -
13.00 – 14.00 Lunch	Review Team, IUQB Quality Reviews Manager, the Senior Management Team/ Steering Group	Informal lunch with the University before departure

## APPENDIX 2

## OVERVIEW OF THE IRIU PROCESS

## INTRODUCTION

Universities have requirements under Section 35 of The Universities Act 1997 to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance and, more relevantly to the IRIU, to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of internal procedures “from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years”. These reviews of effectiveness are designated in The Act as the responsibility of the individual governing authorities. In this way, the autonomy permitted in the organisation of internal reviews is complemented by accountability. In 2002, the governing authorities of all seven universities authorised the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and delegated to IUQB the function of arranging regular reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, which are institutional in their scope.

In 2004-05, the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) jointly commissioned the European University Association (EUA) through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) to undertake the first cycle of external reviews of the seven Irish universities. The resulting sectoral report, published in April 2005, found *“the systematic organisation and promotion of quality assurance at the initiative of the universities themselves”* as being *“unparalleled in any other country in Europe, or indeed in the United States or Canada”*. The reviewers deemed the system *“to strike the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability, and university autonomy. It encourages a greater focus on quality and improvement than some systems worldwide, while at the same time being less intrusive than some other systems in Europe”*. The report concluded that it was, however: *“time to move to a new phase”* that *“should build on the existing system, linking it more closely to strategic management and feeding its outputs into the ongoing development of the universities, individually and collectively”*.

In October 2006, after consultation with the universities, it was agreed that a second cycle of institutional reviews would be initiated in 2009/10. The Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process was approved for publication by the IUQB Board in March 2009. By the end of this rolling cycle of reviews, independent reviewers will have confirmed whether Irish universities are operating in line with the requirements of (i) Section 35 of the Universities Act, 1997, and are (ii) consistent with the Part 1 requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2005 (the ESG).

## IRIU METHOD

The aims and objectives of the IRIU method are:

- to operate an external review process consistent with The Act, and the Part 2 Standards outlined in the ESG
- to support each university in meeting its responsibility for the operation of internal quality assurance procedures and reviews that are clear and transparent to all their stakeholders, and which provide for the continuing evaluation of all academic,

## OVERVIEW OF THE IRIU PROCESS

research and service departments and their activities, as outlined in The Act, incorporating the Part 1 ESG Standards

- to provide evidence that each university continues to engage with national, European and international guidelines and standards, particularly in accordance with the Bologna process
- to support institutional strategic planning and ownership of quality assurance and enhancement to operate as part of the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
- to support the availability of consistent, robust, and timely information on the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes operating within Irish universities
- to provide accountability to external stakeholders in relation to the overall quality of the system and thereby instil confidence in the robustness of the IRIU process

There are four elements to the IRIU method:

- Element 1: Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR)
- Element 2: The Review Visit(s) – Planning Visit and a Main Review Visit
- Element 3: Review Report
- Element 4: Institutional and Sector Level Follow-up

Institutions can expect to undergo IRIU normally every six years. The schedule for the second cycle of institutional reviews (2009/10 – 12/13) is published on the IUQB web site and was developed in consultation with each Irish university and approved by the IUQB Board in June 2009.

### THE REVIEW TEAM

The recruitment of national and international experts to the IRIU Register of Reviewers is conducted bi-annually. Each team of reviewers is selected by the IUQB Board from the Register of Reviewers based on the reviewer's ability to demonstrate current or recent experience in at least three of the seven criteria categories published in the IRIU Handbook. Reviewers are trained, deployed and paid on a per review basis. IRIU Reviewers are not IUQB employees. As part of the nomination and selection process, reviewers sign to confirm any conflicts of interest. Additionally, universities have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their review team in advance of deployment, to ensure there are no conflicts of interest in the proposed review team, and thus the IUQB Board will ensure that an appropriate and entirely independent team of reviewers is selected for the institution being reviewed. The IUQB Board has final approval over the composition of each IRIU review team.

The IRIU review teams will normally consist of:

- two international reviewers (one of which will also act as Review Chair)
- an Irish reviewer
- a student representative
- a representative of external stakeholders
- a co-ordinating reviewer

## REVIEWER TRAINING AND DEPLOYMENT

Each review team will receive institutionally-specific training in advance of deployment. The purpose of reviewer training/briefing is to ensure that all reviewers:

- understand the social, cultural, economic and legal environment within which Irish universities are operating
- become familiar with the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities
- understand the aims and objectives of the IRIU process as well as the key elements of the method
- understand the statutory requirements placed on Irish universities in relation to quality, as outlined in The Act and the ESG
- understand their own roles and tasks and the importance of team coherence and delivering a robust, evidence-based report in a timely manner

## REPORTING

In the interests of equity and reliability, the review team's findings and recommendations presented in the review reports will be based on recorded evidence. In line with ESG guidelines, the team will be asked by the IUQB Reviews Manager on the final day of the Main Review Visit to confirm that the review procedures used have provided adequate evidence to support the team's findings and recommendations on the University's procedures and practices in relation to:

- its fulfilment of its statutory requirements, which includes the:
- regular evaluation of each department, and, where appropriate, faculty and any service provided by the University by persons competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level
- assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the University
- publication of findings arising out of the application of those procedures
- implementation of any findings arising out of the evaluation having regard to the resources available to the university
- its consistency with the Part 1 Standards of the ESG
- operating in line with national, European and international best practice
- identifying and enhancing good practice in the management of quality assurance and enhancement
- identifying issues for further development in relation to the management of quality assurance and enhancement

Two review reports arise from the IRIU - a brief non-technical summary report and a full review report for specialist audiences. Both reports are prepared by the Co-ordinating Reviewer and are signed off by the Chair following consultation with all review team members. The University will be given five weeks in which to comment on factual accuracy and if they so wish, to provide a 1-2 page institutional response to the report that will be published as an appendix to the review report. Each IRIU report will be formally signed off and approved by the IUQB Board once satisfied that the review process was completed in accordance with

## OVERVIEW OF THE IRIU PROCESS

published criteria. Reports will be published by the IUQB thereafter. In accordance with Section 41 of the Universities Act, 1997, the IUQB will submit review reports to the Minister.

**FOLLOW-UP**

One year after the Main Review Visit, the University will be asked to produce a follow-up report (incorporating the institutional action plan), normally submitted alongside the Annual Institutional Report (AIR) and discussed as part of the Annual Dialogue (AD) meeting with the IUQB. Within the report, the University should provide a commentary on how the review findings and recommendations have been discussed and disseminated throughout the University's committee structure and academic units, and comment on how effectively the University is addressing the review outcomes. The report should identify the range of strategic and logistical developments and decisions that have occurred within the institution since the review reports' publication. Institutions will continue to have flexibility in the length and style of the follow-up report but should address each of the key findings and recommendations that the reviewers presented. The follow-up report will be published by the IUQB.

If an IRIU review team identifies in its review report what it considers to be significant causes of concern, particularly in relation to the institution's fulfilment of its statutory requirements, (in accordance with the IUQB's Memorandum of Association, 2006) the IUQB will consult with the University in question to agree an immediate action plan to address the issue(s) of review team concern, including the time-frame in which the issue(s) will be addressed. The University will report to the IUQB every six months on progress against the action plan for the duration of the plan. Where the IUQB considers that progress in implementing the action plan is inadequate, the IUQB may, in consultation with the University and the HEA, intervene to secure a revision or acceleration of the plan, or to arrange a further review visit, ideally involving most or all of the original review team.

The IUQB will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the IRIU process, as part of an organisational commitment to actively contribute to the broader enhancement of a culture of quality across the Irish higher education sector and as required by Part 3 of the ESG.



## UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE IRIU

Dublin City University believes that excellence in all aspects of a university's life is a key driver of higher education. Quality assurance and enhancement are amongst the primary mechanisms by which that excellence can be maintained and developed. Therefore, DCU welcomed the external review of its quality assurance and improvement processes and procedures as an opportunity to reflect on its actions since the initiation of its formal quality promotion procedures in the year 2000, and the first external review in 2004-05, and it will use the outcomes of the review to prepare for the next decade of activities in the area of quality.

DCU would like to thank the international Peer Review Group for the expertise, energy, thoroughness and understanding it brought to the review. The group produced an insightful and detailed report that will greatly assist the University to continue its drive towards quality assurance, enhancement and innovation in a more unpredictable economic climate.

DCU is pleased that the review group found many praiseworthy aspects in its approach to quality. The reviewers determined that DCU is fully compliant with the statutory requirements in the Universities Act (1997), and that the University's activities are consistent with the European Standards and Guidelines. The review confirms that DCU's approach to quality takes cognisance of national, European and international best practice and actively contributes to it.

The review group found that "much thought and attention had been given by members of the University to the recommendations of the 2005 institutional evaluation report" and that DCU "has succeeded in embedding a commendable institution-wide quality culture". Based on a "prudent approach to its finances" DCU has been able "to support a carefully thought through programme of improvements to its estate and its teaching, learning support and research provision".

DCU welcomes the recognition by the Review Team that "over a long period the University has devoted much thought and care to the development of its research strategy" and that "its commitment to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research" has "given the University a distinctive profile". The report recognises DCU's efforts to "improve its research performance significantly" and its "careful peer reviews of the research and competitive merits of proposals while at the same time paying close attention to the projected impact of the research on Ireland's economic and social development". DCU is especially pleased at the Review Team's finding that the "work of DCU INVENT on behalf of the University was considered by the team to be highly commendable and to exemplify good practice".

The reviewers confirm that DCU is a "University with a distinctive and defining approach to higher education", which has put measures into place enabling it to shift the emphasis in its academic work to a pedagogy that focuses principally on learning and learning outcomes and reinforces its "commitment to student-centeredness." In particular, the review report highly commends the "boldness and vision" in conceiving

## UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO THE IRIU

and managing the Academic Framework for Innovation project, leading to the assessment that DCU “can fairly claim to be at the cutting edge in terms of academic quality improvement”. The report recognises the “success of the University” in the “provision for non-standard students” and “the contribution made by its student support services”.

The IRIU report concludes that DCU has taken innovative steps in its approach to quality assurance and enhancement that go beyond the requirements set down by the legislation. Specifically, the review team notes the “admirable reviews of the common themes in its internal review reports” and actions based on these, the Topic Reviews, which “have potential for wider application in other higher education institutions in Ireland and beyond” and the University’s programme validation and accreditation arrangements which “are soundly conceived and responsibly operated”. The report recognises the essential role DCU staff members play in anchoring a quality culture in the University. This is exemplified in “the dedication and energy with which its staff have developed programme descriptors, revised its stock of taught modules and developed learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria for them” and in the way staff members were “fully engaged with the IRIU process”.

DCU strives to continuously maintain and improve on its achievements in quality assurance and enhancement and it is gratified by the Peer Review Group’s remark “that there is abundant evidence that Dublin City University pays careful attention to the findings and recommendations of internal and external reviews of its work and arrangements”. This review will be no exception, and DCU has already started the process of acting on the recommendations contained in the report.

The University welcomes the advice to “take steps to make external funding agencies and stakeholders more aware of the very positive features of its research strategy”, in particular “for the support of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research”.

Work is under way to “introduce further ways for students to provide feedback on their experience with tutors, supervisors and other teaching staff” and also to create more opportunities for University staff to provide “timely feedback to students on their assessed work”. This will be complemented by “a robust performance appraisal system for staff”. DCU fully endorses the suggestion that the University and the Learning Innovation Unit “develop wide use of flexible support arrangements” for staff involved in teaching enhancement while focusing on learning outcomes.

Strenuous efforts will be made to create a better linkage between “the many internal quality review procedures” with the aim “to reduce the burden of ... reviews on staff, and to maximise their benefits to the University”.

DCU will address all the recommendations contained in the Peer Group Report and the report will be made accessible to all staff and students in DCU. The website created in preparation for the review process will be maintained to keep the entire University community briefed on progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the report. All relevant committees have been apprised of the content of the report and actions following from it will involve the entire University. A detailed action plan with a clear time-line, including milestones and possible obstacles, will ensure that DCU achieves all improvements proposed by the peer review group. While the Peer Group Report is an important guideline for future developments, DCU will also

continue to seek students' and staff's feedback on quality-related issues and make an increased effort to incorporate such feedback in developing quality assessment and enhancement. Many actions are already under way and some are nearing completion.

The review took place at a time when the 10-year term of office of DCU's second president, Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski was nearing its conclusion and his successor, Professor Brian MacCraith, was announced. Entering a new phase in DCU's development, the review offers the opportunity to recognise its excellent achievements and innovations in quality assurance and enhancement and to take a positive and proactive approach in deepening its quality culture in the next decade.



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