Institutional Review of Irish Universities

Dublin City University 2010

IRIU Follow-Up Report March 2011

1. Introduction

During the 2009/2010 academic year, DCU developed an Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR) in accordance with the Institutional Review of Irish Universities (IRIU) process. The other required activities for the IRIU were successfully completed, culminating in a review team visit to the University during 1-5th March 2010, and a subsequent report published in June, 2010: http://www.dcu.ie/qpu/pdf/iriu-review.pdf.

DCU welcomed the external review of its quality assurance and improvement processes and procedures. It was viewed as an excellent opportunity to reflect on its work in this area since the initiation of its formal quality promotion procedures in 2000, and the first external review in 2005. The 2010 review determined that DCU is 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 IRIU review group made a considerable number of commendations in all areas of DCU's activities, which strongly endorsed the quality enhancement and assurance activities that have taken place in recent years. Particular attention was paid to quality improvements resulting from the Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI) initiative. These commendations were very well received in the University, and were a welcome affirmation of DCU's quality activities. DCU's receipt of the *Sunday Times University of the Year* award in 2010 further confirmed the importance and relevance of the IRIU commendations.

A year after the main review visit, this follow-up report addressing all the recommendations made by the review group, including the related action plans, is now provided.

2. Review Findings Dissemination and Discussion

The IRIU visit and the resulting commendations and recommendations were disseminated and discussed widely throughout the University. The electronic report from the IRIU review group was provided on DCU's website, and hard copies were also provided to a number of committees. The report was sent to *Governing Authority* members who were fully briefed on the process and outcome by the

Director of Quality Promotion. Assisted by the President, the Authority is engaging with addressing the first recommendation made by the IRIU review group.

The Director of Quality Promotion also provided updates on the visit and outcomes to the *University Executive* and *Academic Council*, and it was discussed at a *Heads* meeting. The *University Executive* reviewed the internal report on the proposed follow-up process, and members of senior management took on the responsibility for developing and implementing action plans for the recommendations.

The *Quality Promotion Committee* has included the IRIU process and subsequent follow-up at every one of its meetings over the last two years, and has been very engaged in the process at all the various stages involved. Members provided valuable assistance in a number of areas including: undertaking specific preparatory tasks, writing draft sections of the Self Assessment Report (SAR), being available to help during the site visit, meeting with the IRIU review group, assisting in developing the University response to the report, advising on the subsequent process, and reviewing many documents including this final follow-up report.

3. IRIU Follow-up Process in DCU

Following a number of University level discussions, the Chair of the Quality Promotion Committee, and the Director of Quality Promotion developed a format for a draft follow-up process. An internal report written by the Director of Quality Promotion suggesting a follow-up methodology, and proposed persons responsible, was presented to the *University Executive*. Some comments from Executive members were incorporated into the final internal report which was approved by the President. Those responsible for each recommendation were invited to submit a response for inclusion in the follow-up report, and were asked to include the following in their submissions:

- Decisions, discussions or actions already undertaken with regard to each recommendation
- Proposed action plans
- Persons/groups/committees responsible for implementing action plans
- Timelines for completion
- Potential obstacles (if any) to completion

The responses for each recommendation were collated by the Director of Quality Promotion for this report.

4. IRIU Recommendations and University Response including Action Plans

In Table 1, the recommendations from the IRIU report are provided with relevant reference details.

DCU Ref	IRIU Ref	Page in IRIU report	IRIU Recommendation
MR1	(1.3)	11	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; Seek opportunities for external members of the Governing Authority to become more closely acquainted with the University's work.
MR2	(1.4)	11	Continue University efforts to synchronise its internal review cycle and its strategic planning cycle.
MR3	(3.5)	24	Develop and support an institution-wide management information system that will be capable of: (1) Providing "health-check" reports at least annually and, for preference, on demand, (2) Supporting the work of managers and committees across the institution.
MR4	(3.6)	24	Analyse and co-ordinate the many internal quality review procedures in order to: (1) Achieve a better linkage with externally-driven reviews, (2) Reduce the burden of internal and external reviews on staff, (3) Maximise their benefits to the University.
MR5	(4.6)	33	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.
MR6	(4.7)	33	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.
MR7	(4.8)	33	Consider carefully the practice of assigning laboratory supervision to PhD students during the culmination of their studies.
MR8	(4.9)	33	Continue to develop support arrangements for postgraduate research students, and; Be more proactive in ensuring that students and supervisors are fully aware of the published academic regulations on the supervisory relationship and how any changes of supervisors may be implemented.
MR9	(4.10)	33	Develop and implement a robust performance appraisal system for staff.
MR10	(4.11)	33	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 rather than on referral or self-referral.

Table 1: DCU IRIU Recommendations and Reference Details

In Table 2 below, the response of the University to each of the IRIU recommendations is provided.

DCU Ref	Comment	Action Plan	Responsibility and Timeline
MR1	It was agreed at Governing Authority that the President would engage with external members of the Authority with a view to exploring mechanisms through which they would become more closely acquainted with the University's work.	Following establishment of a new Governing Authority in May 2011, the President will brief external members on the recommendation including relevant proposals.	**President** **Completion date:** Initial process will be completed by end September 2011, and will be ongoing thereafter.
MR2	A decision has been made to appoint a Vice-President for External and Strategic Affairs (VPESA). This appointment is currently in train.	The development and implementation of this recommendation will be the responsibility of new VPESA, who will be fully briefed on the requirements by the President and others.	**Vice-President for External and Strategic Affairs** (President until VPESA appointed) in co-operation with the Director of Quality Promotion. **Completion date:** End of 2012 and ongoing.
MR3	Significant progress has been made with regard to the provision of an information system to assist the general business of the University, but specifically the production of 'health-check' reports and key data that will support the work of managers and committees across the institution. Initially the introduction of, what is known as a 'Business Intelligence System' (BIS), was discussed and worked on by Education Committee and other committees in consultation with the Information Systems and Services Department (ISS). Education Committee noted that any system ultimately selected would need to be flexible and comprehensive enough to support strategic decision-making and to provide information on the results of decisions. Following the review of possible solutions, ISS, in conjunction with several key users, identified the Oracle BIS as a possible best fit for the University in terms of usability, functionality, scalability, technology, innovation and reliability.	It was agreed that ISS in conjunction with a Student Data Working Group and a Research Data Working Group would undertake a proof of concept exercise using the Oracle's Business Intelligence (OBIEE) product. A Steering Group to oversee the project with representatives from across the University was established in November 2010. At its first meeting, the importance of ensuring that the solution proposed met the following key criteria was agreed: accessibility, authentication and access control, flexibility and ease of use, and scalability. Over the period November 2010 to January 2011, a test data model for Student and Research data was built, and a suite of reports which tested the ability of the OBIEE product to graphically represent complex key student related metrics, and key research metrics, was produced. The outputs from the proof of concept project were demonstrated to the members of the Steering Group in January 2011. Following further discussions it was the view of the Steering Group that OBIEE could provide DCU with a fully functional and scalable Business Intelligence tool, and allow the provision of comprehensive information to support informed decision making across the University	**Vice-President for External and Strategic Affairs** (Deputy President/Registrar until VPESA appointed) in co-operation with the Director of Information Systems & Services **Completion date:** During February 2011, demonstrations of the BI solution were made to members of key University Committees, and at Faculty meetings, and have yielded very positive feedback. The Project Steering Group has now made a recommendation to Education Committee to proceed with the implementation of OBIEE. Subject to approval from Budget Committee and Executive, it is planned that the preparation for the implementation of the Oracle solution and the development of key user reports will begin in mid 2011, with a view to having the most important Student and Research reports available for the academic year 2011/2012.

DCU Ref	Comment	Action Plan	Responsibility and Timeline
MR4	The University was already aware of the desirability to undertake an examination of the level and number of quality review processes currently in place. This recommendation consolidates the need for such a review. A working group formed of members of the Quality Promotion Committee has been set up to address issues related to this recommendation.	1.Undertake an analysis of the different review procedures throughout the University, and consult widely throughout the University as part of this process. 2. Develop a collective mechanism/plan for the quality review process that: - Continues to meet the legislative and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) requirements - Takes into account the current cycle of internal reviews and external reviews. - Has a strategic focus - Has input from, and involves DCU staff - Provides the opportunity to develop cohesive information that may be used for a number of review processes.	**Chair of Quality Promotion Committee** in co-operation with: Director of Quality Promotion, Quality Promotion Committee, Executive Deans and other persons/groups as required. **Completion date:** Mid 2012
MR5	This matter is part of a general discussion on student engagement and support currently taking place across a number of DCU committees including Education Committee, Academic Council and Executive. Currently the University provides scheduled student feedback days each semester immediately following the release of examination results. However the issue of written feedback to students on assessments is less consistent across the University.	The particular element of student feedback has been scheduled as an agenda item for the April meeting of University Standards Committee. The likely outcome of that discussion will be to set up a working group to look at practices across the University, consider examples of best practice nationally and in specific bench-marked universities internationally, with a view to making recommendations on a University-wide set of principles that would underpin approaches to student feedback across DCU programmes.	**Deputy President/Registrar** **Completion date:** The aim is to work towards the roll out of a consistent approach to student feedback during the academic year 2011-2012.
MR6	A decision was made by Education Committee to include an annual programme review and a teaching review, which will elicit feedback from the students on their experience in the classroom.	A number of steps are proposed: 1.Review all current methods of receiving feedback from students on their experience with: -Supervisors (research students) -Lecturing staff (undergraduate students) -Lecturing staff (postgraduate students). 2.Compare these methods with best practice internationally. 3. Develop a draft proposal which ensures a comprehensive feedback system that ensures transparency and avoids duplication of effort.	**Vice-President for Learning Innovation** in co-operation with Director of Student Support & development. Discussions will take place with all relevant parties, including: Students' Union. Education Committee, Executive Deans, Class Reps / Students' Union & Director of Graduate Research **Completion date:** End of 2012

DCU Ref	Comment	Action Plan	Responsibility and Timeline
MR7	Most Schools have policies in place that facilitate reduced hours, or do not require final year postgraduate students in final year to undertake laboratory supervision. This assists postgraduate students so that they can focus on the completion of their research.	As a result of reduced postgraduate numbers in certain Schools, and the significant budgetary pressures and associated staff reductions across the system, most Schools are reviewing their ability to facilitate final year students to opt-out of laboratory supervision in their final year. A comprehensive review of current School practice in this area will be undertaken by Graduate Studies Board in 2010/2011 to inform the adoption of a common university policy for the 2011/2012 academic year. The university is committed to reducing the laboratory supervision duties of final year postgraduate research students, as resource constraints allow.	**Vice-President for Research** (Director of Research Support Services until VPR appointed) in co-operation with the Director of Graduate Research in conjunction with the Graduate Studies Board. **Completion date:** Beginning of 2011/2012 Academic year.
MR8	The University through its new regulations for postgraduate research students is developing a robust framework which focuses on managing the risks associated with the apprenticeship model of research supervision. As it stands, the current apprenticeship model has significant structured elements in place including annual progression and a rigorous process for transfer to PhD. The Graduate Research Office continues to provide significant support arrangements for research students though induction programmes, the development of research student handbooks, and an exit questionnaire. It regularly communicates with research students and supervisors on ongoing initiatives within the University. Training of research supervisors is now an established part of the University's calendar.	The University is currently revising its rules and regulations for postgraduate research students. The draft regulations were issued to all Schools and Faculties over the past number of months for comment, and have subsequently been approved by the University's Graduate Studies Board and University Standards Committee. They will go to the University's Academic Council for final approval in April 2011. In the document there are explicit regulations in terms of what students can expect from supervisors and what supervisors can in turn expect from students. There is also a section on how changes of supervisors can be implemented.	**Director of Graduate Research** in co-operation with the Graduate Studies Board). **Completion date:** Beginning of 2011/2012 Academic year.

DCU Ref	Comment	Action Plan	Responsibility and Timeline
MR9	Discussions have taken place amongst senior management to constitute an appropriate representative group to review and recommend how the University can build on much of the good practice that has developed out of the operation of the existing Performance Management Development Scheme (PMDS). Agreement has been reached among the seven universities that a sector approach should be taken.	Under Partnership, a Working Group chaired by an Executive Dean will be established. The membership of the Group will include the Director of Human Resources (HR), a Head of School, an academic, as well as an administrative and a technical representative. Terms of reference will be developed by the Working Group. The Group will address quality of teaching in the revised performance review scheme. The following activities will inform and support the Working Group in the development of the revised scheme: -The review undertaken by HR of the existing PMDS scheme. -The Benchmarking exercise, that will be undertaken by HR, of Performance Management Schemes both nationally and internationally -The communication and implementation framework proposals. -Updates from University sector approach.	**Director of HR** in co-operation with the Senior Management team, Deans, and Heads/Directors of School/Offices. A number of senior academic and other staff, will assist the championing of the revised scheme's implementation at School/Office level. Cooperation of all staff will be key to the success implementation of the revised scheme. Cooperation from the Union throughout the process will be required to support the scheme for the benefit of all staff. **Completion date:** March 2013
MR10	This recommendation was targeted mainly at international research students, as all taught students receive full support and an orientation programme as a matter of course, upon arrival in the University. Research students receive support directly from their supervisors and the Graduate Research Office.	Given the large number of international students involved in research activities at DCU, the lifecycle for these students will be examined in full, including the types of support which they receive, and at what stage. Focus groups will be conducted with students to ascertain any gaps in the support element. Support will be provided by the International Office and the Graduate Research Office in closer collaboration, to ensure optimal service resulting in increased student satisfaction. Staffing levels in the International Office will also need to be re-examined if further administrative support is to be provided to research students by this Office.	**Vice-President for External and Strategic Affairs** (Director of Student Support & Development until VPESA appointed) The following offices will also be included in the discussions and resulting actions: -International Office -Graduate Research Office -Registry -Finance Office **Completion date:** Beginning of Academic Year 2011/2012

Table 2: DCU Response to IRIU Recommendations

5. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above comments and plans, the University is strongly committed to responding fully to the IRIU recommendations, and has already made considerable progress in many areas. Senior persons responsible for each recommendation have been appointed, and clear action plans involving other individuals and committees/groups have been developed.

The President, the Chair of the Quality Promotion Committee and the Director of Quality Promotion will follow up with those responsible for each recommendation on a regular basis, and a final progress report will be requested for each recommendation. DCU's Senior Management will also ensure that other relevant suggestions for quality enhancement made by the IRIU review group, not included in the main recommendations, will be addressed when appropriate.

Finally, progress on actions related to the IRIU report recommendations will be regularly presented at committee and other meetings throughout the University.