



Peer Review Group Report for Professional Support Areas

2022/2023

Of

Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs

Date: 31 May - 2 June 2023

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1 Introduction and Context

Through a broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement, DCU aims to promote and develop a culture of quality throughout all aspects of the University. The framework derives from the spirit of Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement enshrined in the Universities Act (1997), which is the legislative basis for quality throughout the Irish University sector, and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The DCU processes for quality reviews at DCU are further aligned to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the published guidelines of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI).

This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, following a visit by the Peer Review Group undertaken on 31 May - 2 June 2023.

1.1 Overview of the Area under Review

The Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (OVPA), under the leadership of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (VPAA/Registrar), plays a key role in enabling the University to deliver on its mission by ensuring the student learning experience is of a high quality and truly transformative. The OVPA comprises a Senior Leadership Team and a number of specialist professional and technical constituent units that lead, manage, and support the academic activities of the University. The VPAA/Registrar is a statutory role to which significant strategic, policy, and operational responsibilities are attached. The VPAA/Registrar is the Chief Academic Officer of the University and is responsible to the President for the management of the academic business of the University. Working closely with senior colleagues, the VPAA/Registrar has overall responsibility for the regulation and development of courses and programmes, examinations and assessments, and all matters relating to students' studies. As a designated awarding body, DCU is responsible for the accreditation of its own programmes and awards, and the VPAA/Registrar has a specific remit in respect of academic quality assurance. She leads the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy and key initiatives and supports related to this and has responsibility for key areas of operations related to the student life cycle, and she formally represents the University externally. The VPAA/Registrar is supported in her role by the constituent units that make up OVPA and the University's established committee structures.

The OVPA's remit spans institutional leadership for teaching, learning, and assessment; overall responsibility for academic governance, quality assurance, and the quality of student academic experience; creating and maintaining the student record, ownership and responsibility for the effective execution of critical, University, academic-related operations, and specific associated (IT) systems support; postgraduate research learning and support; responsibility for executive leadership, governance, and implementation of major institutional teaching and learning-related strategic projects. In addition to the core business, the VPAA/Registrar oversees several strategically-aligned academic initiatives, including the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) University Initiative, the creation of the DCU Placement Unit, and the evolution of DCU Studio. The OVPA also provides executive leadership for the Student Information System (SIS) Programme, and DCU Futures, an ambitious, government-funded curriculum transformation project. These ultimately depend on delivery in Faculties and other units. A number of project teams and working groups in OVPA support these initiatives, drawing on the experience and expertise of colleagues from across the University.

This review does not include the Registry function, nor the major initiatives of DCU Futures the Student Information System (SIS) Programme, which also sit within the remit of OVPAA. Registry was reviewed separately in December 2020 and these strategic projects are time-bound funded initiatives subject to separate evaluation mechanisms. The following university committees are under the remit of OVPAA: Academic Council, Education Committee, University Standards Committee, Graduate Research Studies Board, SIS Steering Group, Strategic Learning Innovation Projects, ECIU Oversight committee.

The constituent units of the OVPAA along with their numbers of staff and locations are given below. Staff numbers include Heads of Unit and vacancies in May 2023.

Teaching Enhancement Unit: Current staffing: 12; Location: Bea Orpen Building, Glasnevin Campus and F Block, St Patrick's Campus

DCU Placement: Current staffing: 15; Location: Henry Grattan Building, Glasnevin Campus

DCU Studio: Current Staffing: 15; Location: Bea Orpen Building and Stokes Extension, Glasnevin Campus

Graduate Studies Office: Current staffing: 6; Location: McNulty Building, Glasnevin Campus

Academic Secretariat: Current staffing: 9; Location: Bea Orpen Building and Albert College Extension, Glasnevin Campus

Academic Systems: Current staffing: 5; Location: Albert College Extension, Glasnevin Campus

Guru Development Unit: Current staffing: 4; Location: Stokes Building, Glasnevin Campus

Registry: Current Staffing: 61.5; Location: Henry Grattan Building, Glasnevin Campus and C Block, St Patrick's Campus

SIS Programme Team: Current Staffing: 54; Location: Henry Grattan Building and Bea Orpen Building, Glasnevin Campus

DCU Futures Team: Current Staffing: 4 core Futures team members and 105 academics and professional staff across DCU; Location: Invent Building and Stokes Building, Glasnevin Campus

2 Approach to Self-Assessment

2.1 Quality Review Committee

The self-assessment phase of the Quality Review was led by an internal quality review committee. Committee membership was as follows:

- Professor Lisa Looney
- Dr Rachel Keegan
- Professor Brian Corcoran
- Ms Fiona Deane
- Dr Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl
- Mr Ian Harrison
- Mr Olivier Kazmierczak
- Ms Sharon King
- Mr Rob Lowney

The OVPAA self-assessment process commenced formally in November 2022, led by the OVPAA Quality Review Committee (QRC). QRC membership was designed to ensure balanced representation from across the units, a suitable mix of grades and roles, and an appropriate gender mix. The role of QRC members was to coordinate the self-assessment phase, act as the conduits between the QRC and their respective units and assist in the production and review of the self-assessment report. The QRC was chaired by the VPAA/Registrar and a member of Academic Secretariat was assigned as the lead coordinator. The QRC met regularly from early November 2022 and the quality review was a regular item on all Unit-level meeting agendas. Colleagues from across the units had opportunities to engage and contribute during the self-assessment phase through facilitated Away Days, locally arranged self-reflection activities, and by providing direct input into the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). Each unit was required to complete its own SWOC analysis, which informed the development of the OVPAA SWOC analysis.

2.2 The Self-Assessment Report

The PRG recognizes the high level of engagement in the Self-Assessment Process by the QRC and staff in OVPAA more broadly as evidenced by the comprehensive, coherent and reflective Self-Assessment Report. The PRG also acknowledges the breadth and complexity of the OVPAA's areas of responsibility and the resultant challenges this posed in the preparation of the SAR.

DCU and the OVPAA have undergone many significant changes in recent years in both structures and personnel. Significant changes reflected in the SAR include the incorporation within DCU of the Church of Ireland College of Education, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and the Mater Dei Institute of Education in 2016. The Academic Systems unit was established within OVPAA in 2017, followed by the establishment of the Academic Secretariat unit. The Student Information System (SIS) Programme is currently working towards major implementation milestones in September 2023 and September 2024. The Academic Calendar Project was initiated in 2018 and resulted in the implementation of a revised calendar in 2021–2022. The Guru Development Unit (a bespoke in-house software development unit)

was relocated to OVPAA, reporting to the Academic Secretary, in August 2020. DCU's VPAA/Registrar and OVPAA also played a key leadership role in shaping the institutional response to the pandemic in 2020 and thereafter.

Consultation with staff throughout the constituent units in the OVPAA and strategic projects appears to have been regular and thorough throughout the Self-Assessment Process. A SWOC analysis was undertaken by each constituent unit under review and by the OVPAA as a whole and these were provided in the SAR. PRG notes that the SWOC analyses are primarily internally focused and that external challenges are not comprehensively addressed. Consultation with wider university colleagues, students and other relevant external stakeholders appears to have been somewhat limited. Facilitated focus groups, questionnaires, Away Days, and a review of existing sources of data were mentioned in the SAR. However, the PRG noted that quantitative data and analysis were not utilised to a significant degree and that the results of such engagement were not clearly evidenced in the SAR.

3 Approach Taken By Peer Review Group

3.1 Peer Review Group Members

Membership of the Peer Review Group for the Quality Review was as follows:

- Prof. Pól Ó Dochartaigh (Chair), Deputy President and Registrar, University of Galway
- Prof. Marja Sutela, Vice President for Education, Tampere University
- Prof. Caroline McMullan, Full Professor of Business & Society, DCU Business School
- Dr. Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Director for Policy Coordination and Foresight, European University Association
- Mr. Glen Scanlon Tims, DCU Student Representative, DCU Humanities & Social Sciences Faculty Representative
- Dr. Deirdre Nic Mhathúna, Assistant Professor, DCU Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge

3.2 Overview of Approach Taken by Peer-Review Group

In advance of the Peer-Review Visit, the PRG engaged with the extensive documentation provided by the Quality Promotion Office (QPO) and provided initial impressions before the review visit in order to identify possible themes to explore during the visit. The documentation provided in advance included the SAR, documentation relating to the Quality Review Process in DCU and a draft timetable for the visit. Additional documents were requested during the visit, for example a University Organisational Chart. These were provided by the QPO. At a pre-visit online meeting between the Director of Quality Promotion, Ms Aisling McKenna and the external members of the PRG, Prof. Pól Ó Dochartaigh agreed to chair the PRG. Dr Deirdre Nic Mhathúna took on the role of Coordinating Reviewer. The Chair agreed to give the exit presentation to OVPAA staff at the end of the Peer-Review Visit.

As detailed in the timetable provided in Appendix 1, meetings were held with members of staff in the OVPAA, stakeholders and Senior Management during the Peer-Review Visit. These included meetings with the Director of Quality Promotion, members of the Quality Review Committee, the OVPAA Senior Leadership Team, colleagues in each of the constituent units and strategic projects, stakeholders, DCU Senior Management Group and the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), Prof. Lisa Looney. A tour of OVPAA facilities was led by Prof. Brian Corcoran, Deputy Registrar.

Members of the PRG prepared in advance of each meeting and a member of the PRG was assigned to lead the discussion at each meeting. Other members of the PRG also participated as appropriate. From the outset, the PRG wished to encourage a collegial approach and invited colleagues to sit among members of the panel during meetings. The PRG welcomed the fact that in the majority of meetings the breadth of expertise within units and the sense of collegiality were apparent, leading to open dialogue with the PRG.

4 Approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The present Quality Review is undertaken in the context of DCU's Quality Review Process for Academic and Support Units. This is the first Quality Review of OVPAA in its current structure. Previous related reviews include the 2020 Thematic Review of Digital Learning; the 2019 Quality Review of Student Support and Development (as it relates to DCU Placement); the 2018 Quality Review of External Affairs (as it relates to DCU Placement); the 2018 DCU Cinnte Institutional Review (as it relates to academic affairs); the 2009 Thematic Review of Postgraduate Students (taught and research); the 2007 Quality Review of the Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation (as it relates to the current remit of OVPAA). However, these previous reviews did not feature centrally in discussions with staff in the OVPAA. The PRG acknowledges that the OVPAA structures have changed significantly in many areas in the interim. Attention was drawn in the SAR to a number of recommendations which have been implemented or are being implemented. Resourcing and communication issues were noted in the SAR as themes arising in several reviews. These issues are echoed in recruitment and communication challenges which emerged during the current review.

5 Findings of the Peer Review Group

5.1 Planning and Effective Management of Resources

The OVPAA is comprised of strong and dedicated units. The evidence in the SAR, as well as from the site visit, indicates that the services provided by the units under the OVPAA are broadly appreciated by various internal stakeholders; with particular praise for the TEU, and the programme validation and accreditation processes, which are managed by the Academic Secretariat. This is also the case for initiatives such as DCU Futures and DCU Studio. There is no doubt that the OVPAA is dedicated to the mission of DCU to transform lives and societies and that the units contribute significantly to a transformative student experience.

As a whole, however, as recognised in the SAR and arising from the changes in unit structures and remit, the OVPAA is only at the very first stages of developing collective leadership with a common identity and purpose beyond the individual units. This need for greater collective leadership was evidenced by siloed approaches between the units and by considerable differences in working culture and management styles.

- The formation of an OVPAA Management Board - comprising, at a minimum, the unit heads under the OVPAA - will help eliminate the siloed planning and improve the

coordination of OVPAA priorities. Recommendations in relation to the formation of this Board are set out in Section 7 of this report.

The overarching strategic priorities for the OVPAA should be discussed and agreed at this OVPAA Management Board. This would bring a whole of unit approach to planning and the management of cross-functional initiatives and provide clear guidance/criteria against which decisions regarding agreed shared priorities can be made.

DCU collects useful data for monitoring, evidence-based decision making, and data-driven management. There were examples of staff using the locally developed GURU for student performance data, external examiner feedback, monitoring of year-on-year registrations etc. Nevertheless, very little data was presented as evidence in the SAR, and the interviews at the site visit gave the impression of a mixed level of data use between the various units within the OVPAA. There was little sign of a coherent approach to data-driven governance and decision-making for the Office as a whole. Some of this was explained by the yet-to-happen implementation of SIS, which will give new and better access to data. However, there seems to be adequate data available already to implement more systematic use of data for monitoring and decision making for the OVPAA as a whole.

This would also facilitate the development of a common quality enhancement culture across the Office. In those cases where there are quantifiable ways of defining success, this could bring a shared understanding of progress, weaknesses and challenges.

The management of human resources within the OVPAA deserves special mention. The site visit allowed us to meet with many high-performing individuals who have the potential to advance into more senior roles. Leadership development opportunities should be designed for all staff holding leadership roles and those with leadership potential.

Given the level of change taking place, care must be taken to prioritise the well-being of OVPAA staff. Data from the staff well-being surveys, while preserving anonymity, should be utilised to determine the range of supports which could be implemented. Data from DCU Fuse should also be monitored and may also be useful in this regard.

Development opportunities and a proactive approach to staff care will help ensure each person meets their full potential. This is especially important in light of the skills shortages which were evident in the SAR and during the visit. The OVPAA should develop a proactive approach to skills shortages, building on initiatives such as the 'graduate positions' created so successfully in the SIS Project.

5.2 Effectiveness of Activities and Processes

The high quality of individuals working across the OVPAA is evident. Moreover, the individual units show great dedication to their area of work and it was the clear impression of the PRG that they are often widely recognised for their quality across DCU. The SAR rightly points to the necessity to create a stronger identity for the Office and its functions within DCU at large, as well as within the Office. The SAR also points out the identity within some units might be influenced by recent changes.

For the external identification of the various functions within the OVPAA, it would be beneficial to rethink the current methods of communication, as detailed below in Section 5.3. Regarding the internal identity, the PRG noticed that most units did have a palpable culture and identity, but also that units did not share an overall identity of how the different parts of the OVPAA work together as a whole. There was also a lack of common culture in terms of cooperation, leadership and communication. This was underlined by the fact that the SAR was the first common project for the Office as a whole.

Creating a shared identity would greatly enhance the ability of staff to develop synergies and for management within the Office to articulate common goals and criteria for success, which again would lead to a more explicit quality enhancement culture.

The SAR mentions Away Days as a way to build common identity and culture. It is the view of the PRG that a more structured approach is needed, mainly through the establishment of the above-mentioned management board but also through facilitating communication between staff in different units and creating an understanding and appreciation of differences within units.

The present diversity and sometimes siloed approach in many cases create widely different cultures within the individual units, in terms of how the units work, their language, goals and communication. These cultures are often positive and correspond to the nature and tasks of the unit, and they should be recognised. It is important that this is done in an explicit way that values the diversity within the Office. If all staff appreciate and understand these differences it should make it easier to build better cross-unit communication and develop a common identity within the Office as a whole.

One concrete case is the relationship between the Teaching Enhancement Unit and DCU Studio, which the executive summary of the SAR describes as ‘confused’ with respect to the functions of each of the units. This seemed indeed to be the case at the site visit, where staff pointed to lack of communication and cooperation. The PRG noted that the two units had distinct cultures that are probably shaped by their ways of working: the Teaching Enhancement Unit works to support educators in a variety of ways, including voluntary communities of practice, while DCU Studio produces content and services often connected to specific projects such as DCU Futures. Moreover, the funding of each unit is different with DCU Studio having 80% external income. This clearly leads to different approaches, which are both fit for purpose: The TEU appears very community-oriented in its culture, while DCU Studio is more focused on attaining specific results and meeting deadlines. The reviewers saw the units as being highly complementary, but not well delimited in their activities. Careful delineation of the remits of the Teaching Enhancement Unit and DCU Studio should ensure the value of each is recognised.

Some units had experienced substantive change and met serious crises over the last years, the Pandemic being a common, disruptive experience. This includes units that have been incorporated into the OVPAA after their original establishment, new units or units that have undergone significant change in recent years. The constant challenge of staff shortages adds to the general sense of reactive problem-solving rather than proactive thinking towards enhancement. As one interviewee put it: “We have been in start-up mode for two years”.

The DCU Futures project and to some extent the SIS project point to a more reflective and proactive direction, and there were high expectations for both projects. That being said, SIS in

particular did require considerable resources in an already stretched environment. Moreover, the current status of the two projects at times led to an increased sense of being in a state of flux.

It would be important for all units to have the space for thinking in proactive terms about how to meet new challenges before they arrive and generally consider how to enhance the (already high) quality of their tasks and services.

There was some evidence of a tendency to design processes and make changes for their immediate functionality before considering the strategic deliverables and the fitness for purpose. This could be seen in the creation of new units without proper delineation of their remits and division of labour with other units. The challenge also came from a funding system that too often finances specific projects rather than having sufficient and sustainable core funding for universities. The PRG found that there could be more thought put into how new processes and projects fit the overall objectives of the office, and also make sure that there is consideration of the sustainability of projects so that an initiative is not stopped before it is clear how this is to be continued and/or a proper hand-over can be made.

Particularly regarding smooth transitions when units are losing staff or changed, it will be important to have set procedures and practices for the storing of data and communications. At the site visit, there was one example from DCU Placement, where staff had left with important data being stored on their personal email accounts and therefore no longer available for new staff. Perhaps a reflection of the rapid growth in the size of DCU, there is a tendency, perhaps within DCU as a whole, to be - as it was put in an interview - “working with a small university mentality” with much information happening through informal channels. While this is undoubtedly important, it is equally important to have processes that ensure that there is continuity and traceability of important information and that communication happens regularly. More such processes might also prevent crises that occur due to changes in staff or lack of information between different stakeholders.

In order to ensure a stable working environment with space for proactive thinking, it could be beneficial for a new management board to agree on annual areas for focus and improvement, monitor progress in these key areas and close gaps identified.

This is strongly related both to communications in Section 5.3 below and to the establishment of a quality enhancement culture as specified in Section 5.4 below.

5.3 Communication and Provision of Information

The PRG recognised that there has been significant change in DCU in recent years, including a degree of realignment of units. The units under review have continued to work efficiently and effectively throughout that period of change. It is critical, however, not only that the units themselves understand the changes and configuration, but that these are understood in the wider university too. Additionally, there was some uncertainty as to the scale of change still to come in the OVPAA, and more generally the point that had been reached in the change process in the University as a whole. This created a degree of uncertainty that could be addressed by a greater degree of communication.

The PRG was impressed by the strength of interpersonal relationships in the unit (and see Section 5.2 above). It seemed clear that some of these relationships had been built up before the recent changes, and that they continued to evolve through the changes. A risk, however, in not formalising the structures is that such communication could be over-reliant on individual relationships and lead to information sometimes not being more widely known, or even lost in the event of a departure from the University, as had been the case in the above-mentioned example from DCU Placement.

The PRG considers that greater communication of information and knowledge can only enhance both the performance of the University and the strong identification with the University, even through a period of change, that was so evident in our meetings. To that end, we would advise that:

- The extent of change still to come within the OVPAA be clearly communicated.
- Established and embedded structures such as Faculty Teaching & Learning Committees should be used to communicate and cascade key strategy and information to staff across the University.
- The Office should enhance communications with students and the SU, and the students' knowledge of systems, especially the officers when they first come into the role.

5.4 Ongoing Quality Enhancement

The DCU quality management and enhancement model is described in the SAR on pages 11-12. It is based on national legislation and European guidelines such as the ESG 2015. According to the report "The University has a responsibility for delivering the highest standard of academic excellence for all awards conferred in its name. To this end, the University has developed an overarching comprehensive quality framework through which it conducts a variety of internal and external reviews."

From a quality management perspective, the question of quality culture is fundamental, meaning shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality as well as a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts: how quality culture is understood and who owns the quality culture of the university. In meetings, quality culture was defined in many different ways and where the ownership of the term resides remained unclear. Building a common understanding of DCU's quality culture and how to verify it would strengthen quality enhancement. A strong quality culture is not just about doing the right things with the best possible expertise, but about systematically verifying progress.

The SAR is very carefully prepared and comprehensive. It is evident that the self-evaluation process has been useful for OVPAA activities. The SAR identifies areas for improvement and, based on discussions with various stakeholders, the findings are correct. However, the report does not highlight statistics or indicators (KPIs) related to activities relating to systematic quality enhancement.

An essential part of quality enhancement is a culture of continuous improvement. In this context, it is important to measure and monitor how progress is being made in improvement activities.

There is extensive evidence of quality management and enhancement in areas such as programme development, validation and accreditation. The adoption of a systematic approach at unit and project level (such as PDCA / Plan-Do-Check-Act from ISO) would assist with the overall management of quality within the OVPAA. A more aligned and systematic use of the available data for evidence-based decision making and quality enhancement across the OVPAA is essential. Implementation of SIS will help facilitate this, but is only part of the solution.

The SAR and the discussions highlighted the challenges in attracting individuals with specific skillsets to key roles within the OVPAA and the burden of change. It was pointed out that the university regularly conducts staff surveys, but there is no systematic processing of the results at unit or team level. In future, the VPAA should process the results at unit level and, on the basis of the results, development measures should be drawn up and their implementation monitored on an annual basis.

The OVPAA office is staffed by highly skilled and committed individuals. Cooperation and interaction between the different teams should be strengthened in the future. A good start has been made with the OVPAA's first Away Day, i.e. joint planning day, but this must be embedded in a more structured approach.

5.5 External Perspectives

The PRG acknowledges the overall positive feedback from external stakeholders and the role that OVPAA units play in the development and enhancement of teaching, learning and research practices within DCU. Our findings outline that a clear communicational and informational disconnect exists between OVPAA and its stakeholders. The system which is currently used for the promotion of information from OVPAA in its current form, the cascading model where information is passed on in a hierarchical manner from top to bottom with a reliance on individual relationships, is not sustainable and has considerable weaknesses. A structured approach to engagement with key stakeholders within and external to DCU should be designed and implemented to ensure a user-centric approach to the design and delivery of key services by the OVPAA.

Students and student representatives, in particular DCU Students' Union leadership, commend the openness and access to OVPAA leadership. The student representatives also commended DCU Futures, highlighting that students in these programmes are engaging more confidently in comparison with many other programmes. Modern day learning prospects are described as being highly valuable to students. The SIS project attracted similar comments, described as being beneficial to students, especially in the areas where students will most engage with elements of SIS, such as in Registry and DCU Placement applications.

OVPAA engages with student representatives across its various bodies, the primary supplier of student representatives being DCU Students' Union (DCUSU). There are seven officers of DCUSU (elected to a one-year term) who fall within the academic affairs remit and are members of the various sub-committees of Academic Council (AC). The academic affairs officer, part of DCUSU leadership, is a member of Education Committee and University Standards Committee. The postgraduate (taught and research) officer is a member of the Graduate Research Studies Board. There is a part-time faculty representative for each DCU faculty who is also a member of

the corresponding Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. All seven officers are *ex-officio* members of AC. Student representatives on all other OVPAA committees (such as the Faculty Research Committees) are not decreed to be DCU Students' Union officers.

Student representatives described Academic Council as 'intimidating'. When asked what more OVPAA could provide, one faculty representative put it simply as 'knowledge', which was subsequently agreed to amongst the part-time student representatives as invaluable to fulfilling their duties and generally being difficult to obtain (particularly in relation to their roles on committees). The formalisation of meetings between DCU Students' Union leadership and OVPAA leadership was also discussed as a beneficial potential improvement. Along with this, student representatives outlined a desire for closer engagement and broadened collaboration with OVPAA. Therefore, we recommend that OVPAA take steps to enhance communications with students and DCUSU/student representatives, and that efforts are made to increase student knowledge of systems, especially the DCUSU officers when they first come into the role.

Faculties commend the strong academic support from OVPAA units, and that facilities offered to faculties from OVPAA are instrumental to faculty effectiveness. There was broad appreciation for the clear processes and models for quality enhancement such as for Annual Programme Reviews and Periodic Programme Reviews. Staff expressed that although OVPAA is invaluable, there is a deficiency of resources to support faculty practicalities. The PRG considers that the systems functionality enabled by the implementation of the SIS Programme will enable the OVPAA to more fully support the development of protocols to support complex programme structures and collaborations, providing both clarity and efficiency to Faculties and other units.

There was a broad admission that the role of individual relationships in communication between OVPAA and faculties is not fit for purpose, and that key individual knowledge fundamental to the efficiency of both OVPAA and faculty processes is at risk of being lost. In some instances, Faculty colleagues noted a slow cascade of information on the development of a teaching and learning strategy, pointing to a reliance by OVPAA on internal faculty communication structures. Other central support units of DCU outside of OVPAA displayed a broad sense of positivity around OVPAA systems and collaboration, citing that almost all units 'touch points' with OVPAA operated on an ad-hoc basis. Like faculties, there was general agreement that communication from OVPAA to other internal DCU units is based upon individual relationships between staff in OVPAA and those units. Although there was broad excitement around major OVPAA projects like SIS and DCU Futures, there was an acknowledgement that there is some confusion/poor understanding of SIS in particular.

The PRG recognised a consistent weakness throughout the meetings with the stakeholder groups, that there is an over-reliance on individual relationships that can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and resources. As a result, the PRG recommends that OVPAA implements and establishes new formal fora to enhance informal collegial relationships with key stakeholders, to mend the communication gaps between OVPAA and external units.

6 SWOC Analysis and Plans for Improvement

6.1 SWOC Analysis for the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs

The self-assessment report for the Area included a proposed summary SWOC analysis of the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs. As a result of the Peer Review Group's analysis of the self-assessment report and findings from the peer review visit, we propose the following SWOC analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly dedicated and professional staff• Desire to future-proof DCU• Strong commitment to and pride in DCU as an entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to develop greater common identity and common goals in OVPAA• Narrow understanding of quality culture• Uneven use of data
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Newness means a tabula rasa for OVPAA communications• Structuring the engagement with students and the SU• Building an effective SIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff• Cybersecurity• Low core funding for universities• Uncertain future in terms of skills needs and technology (AI)

6.2 Plans for Improvement Identified by Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs

The OVPAA identified a number of areas for improvement in the SAR. These were presented in the following categories: Identity, Remit, and Culture; Delivery of Core Functions; Engagement and Collaboration; Resources; Designing foundations for the future. The PRG agrees overall with the areas identified for improvement and notes that they align with the main findings of the PRG. It was noted that the areas for improvement were more process-focused rather than goals-focused and that this could lead to challenges in addressing some of the issues raised. The main gaps that the PRG recognised were a need to monitor the progress of development and improvement activities and to define quality and success more explicitly.

7 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

No	Commendation	P	Level	
Planning and Effective Management of Resources				
1	Commendation			Strong alignment to the University's mission to transform lives and societies
2	Commendation			Deep sense of pride and loyalty to DCU evidenced
Effectiveness of Activities and Processes				
3	Commendation			Clear ambition to deliver a high quality student experience
4	Commendation			Very high degree of professionalism in the OVPAA and its constituent units
Communication and Provision of Information				
Ongoing Quality Enhancement				
5	Commendation			Desire to future-proof DCU in a competitive, challenging context
Stakeholder Relationships				
6	Commendation			Intensely collegial atmosphere evident in most areas

No	Recommendation	P	Level	
Planning and Effective Management of Resources				
1	Recommendation	P1	A	
	Establish an OVPAA Management Board			<p>The OVPAA would benefit from the collective leadership experienced so positively at the University Senior Management level. The formation of an OVPAA Management Board, comprising the heads of the functions/units within the OVPAA, would help eliminate the siloed planning and management evident in the SAR and during the Quality Review Visit.</p> <p>A schedule of monthly meetings should be published annually. Membership should include (at a minimum):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPAA & Registrar • Deputy Registrar

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of T&L • Dean of Strategic Innovation • Director of Micro-Credential Strategy & Innovation • Dean of Graduate Studies • Academic Secretary • Director of Registry
2	Recommendation	P1	A	
	Prioritise the well-being of OVPAA staff given the ongoing change environment			Utilise data from staff well-being surveys, DCU Fuse etc., while preserving anonymity, to inform where opportunities for enhancement may exist.
3	Recommendation	P2	A	
	Implement more systematic use of data for monitoring and decision making for the OVPAA as a whole			A more aligned and systematic use of the available data for evidence-based decision making and quality enhancement across the OVPAA is essential. Implementation of SIS will help facilitate this, but is only part of the solution.
Effectiveness of Activities and Processes				
4	Recommendation	P2	A/U	
	Ensure sustainability of strategic projects			DCU Futures and DCU Studio are exciting initiatives. Care must be taken to ensure these activities are mainstreamed so they are embedded and sustainable after specific funding has ceased.
5	Recommendation	P2	A	
	Delineation of TEU and DCU Studio			TEU and DCU Studio are complementary units. Careful delineation of their remits should ensure the value of each is recognised to the full.
Communication and Provision of Information				
6	Recommendation	P2	A	
	Enhance communication with students and SU			Enhance communications with students and the SU, and the students' knowledge of systems, especially the officers when they first come into the role.
Ongoing Quality Enhancement				
7	Develop a quality enhancement culture	P1	A	Continue to further develop a quality enhancement culture based on continuous improvement, including systematic collection, analysis of feedback and action.
8	Identify and agree annual priorities for focus and enhancement	P1	A	Collective agreement by the OVPAA management team on annual priorities for focus and enhancement. Monitor progress in these key areas & close gaps identified.

Stakeholder Relationships				
9	Recommendation	P1	A	
	Establish formal fora for consultation with key stakeholders.			Enhance informal relationships by establishing formal fora for consultation with key stakeholders.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs Quality Review 2023: Indicative Advance Timetable

Time	Peer PRG (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue	Attendees / Notes
Day 1 - Wednesday, 31 May			
10:00 - 10:30	Arrival of PRG Members, private discussion time.	NRF Seminar Room	
10:30 - 11:00	Briefing by the Director of Quality Promotion who will provide guidelines to assist the PRG during the visit and in developing its report	NRF Seminar Room	- Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion
11:00 - 12:30	PRG private discussion time. During this time the PRG will: - select a Chairperson - discuss key themes and areas for exploration based on the report - assign tasks and responsibilities among members	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
12:30 - 13:30	Light lunch with the Director of Quality Promotion	NRF Seminar Room	LUNCH
13:30 - 14:30	Consideration of the self- assessment process with the Quality Review Committee. The Director of Quality Promotion will also attend this session. This session will commence with a short presentation by Vice-President Academic Affairs/Registrar, followed by a discussion.	NRF Seminar Room	- Professor Lisa Looney, Vice-President for Academic Affairs/Registrar - Professor Brian Corcoran, Deputy Registrar - Dr Rachel Keegan, Academic Secretariat, Lead Coordinator - Ms Fiona Deane, DCU Placement - Mr Ian Harrison, Guru Development Unit - Mr Olivier Kazmierczak, Academic Systems - Ms Sharon King, Graduate Studies Office - Mr Rob Lowney, Teaching Enhancement Unit - Dr Máiread Nic Giolla Mhichíl, DCU Studio - Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion
14:30 - 15:00	Tour of OVPAA facilities with Professor Brian Corcoran, Deputy Registrar		
15:00 - 15:15	PRG private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
15:15 - 16:00	Meeting with OVPAA Senior Leadership Team	NRF Seminar Room	- Professor Lisa Looney, Vice-President for Academic Affairs//Registrar - Professor Brian Corcoran, Deputy Registrar - Ms Phyl McMorro, Director of Registry - Dr Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Director of Micro-Credential Strategy and Innovation - Professor Joseph Stokes, Dean of Graduate Studies - Dr Monica Ward, Dean of Teaching and Learning

			- Professor Blánaid White, Dean of Strategic Learning Innovation
16:00 - 16:30	Meeting with Teaching Enhancement Unit	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Monica Ward, Dean of Teaching and Learning - Dr Martina Crehan, Head of the Teaching Enhancement Unit - Ms Clare Gormley, Academic Developer - Mr Henry Langton, Learning Technology Support Officer - Mr Rob Lowney, Learning Technologist - Dr Fiona O'Riordan, Academic Developer - Dr Suzanne Stone, Academic Developer
16:30 - 17:00	Meeting with Graduate Studies Office	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor Joseph Stokes, Dean of Graduate Studies - Ms Karen Keating, Graduate Studies Office Manager - Ms Taylor Gonzales, PA to the Dean - Mr Jonny Hobson, Research and Scholarship Administrator - Ms Sharon King, Graduate Studies Project Officer - Ms Linda Prosa, Graduate Skills Officer
17:00 - 17:30	PRG private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
19:00 - 21:00	PRG Private Dinner and discussion		DINNER AT HOTEL
Day 2 - Thursday, 1 June 2023			
08:45 - 09:15	PRG private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
09:15 - 09:45	Meeting with DCU Placement	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor Brian Corcoran, Deputy Registrar - Ms Paula Murray, Director of Placement - Ms Fiona Deane, Coordinator - Ms Vikki Doyle, International Mobility Coordinator - Ms Sarah Fleming, Coordinator & Marketing Administration - Ms Edel O'Reilly, Administrative Support - Ms Vanessa Wade, Coordinator
09:45 - 10:15	Meeting with DCU Studio	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Director of Micro-credential Strategy and Innovation, Head of DCU Studio - Ms Celine Heffernan, Senior Business Development Officer for Micro-Credentials - Mr Richard Herlihy, Digital Media Designer - Dr Conchúr Mac Lochlainn Micro-Credential Project Officer & Developer - Ms Caitríona Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Micro-credential Institutional Project Manager - Mr Matthew Watters, Lead Learning Designer
10:15 - 10:45	Meeting with Guru Development Unit	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr David Molloy, Head of Guru Development Unit - Mr Tony Ayres, Senior Software Architect - Ms Katarzyna Fidos, Senior Software Developer - Mr Ian Harrison, Senior Software Developer
10:45 - 11:30	PRG Coffee / private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
11:30 - 12:00	Meeting with Academic Systems	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms Pauline Mooney, Academic Secretary - Mr Olivier Kazmierczak, Head of Academic Systems - Mr Aengus Gordon, Senior Business Analyst - Mr Niall O'Flanagan, Senior Business Analyst
12:00 - 12:30	Meeting with Academic Secretariat	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms Pauline Mooney, Academic Secretary - Ms Valerie Cooke, Administrative Assistant - Ms Grainne Curran, Senior Secretarial Assistant - Ms Bernadette Dowling, Operational Excellence Lead - Ms Megan Howell, Administrative Assistant - Ms Margaret Irwin-Bannon, Senior Administrator - Dr Rachel Keegan, Senior Administrator

			- Dr David McCarthy, Senior Administrator
12:30 - 13:15	Meeting with a number of colleagues involved in strategic academic initiatives under the remit of VPAA	NRF Seminar Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor Lisa Looney, Vice-President for Academic Affairs/Registrar - Ms Olivia Daly, ECIU Senior Project Officer (ECIU University Initiative) - Ms Bernadette Dowling, Operational Excellence Lead (Operating Framework) - Dr Ciaran Dunne, Transversal Skills Director (DCU Futures) - Ms Pauline Mooney, Academic Secretary (SIS programme, Operating Framework, Revised Academic Calendar) - Dr Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Director of Micro-credential Strategy and Innovation, (MicroCreds Project) - Professor Blánaid White, Dean of Strategic Learning Innovation (DCU Futures)
13:15 - 14:15	Lunch / PRG private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	LUNCH
14:15 - 15:00	Stakeholder Group 1: Faculty representatives	NRF Seminar Room	
15:00 - 15:45	Stakeholder Group 2: Relevant Central Support Units - senior representatives	NRF Seminar Room	
15:45 - 16:00			SHORT BREAK
16:00 - 16:30	Stakeholder Group 3: Student representatives [ZOOM SESSION]	NRF Seminar Room	
16:30 - 16:45	PRG private discussion time	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
16:45 - 17:15	Staff Open Forum for any member of OVPAA	NRF Seminar Room	Open forum
17:15 - 18:00	Meeting with VPAA/Registrar	NRF Seminar Room	- Professor Lisa Looney, Vice-President for Academic Affairs/Registrar
19:00 21:00	PRG Private Dinner and Meeting		DINNER AT HOTEL
Day 3 - Friday, 2 June 2023			
08:45 - 09:15	PRG Private meeting time	AG01	PRIVATE SESSION
09:15 - 10:15	PRG Meeting with Senior Management Group	AG01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor Daire Keogh, DCU President - Ms Jennifer Bruton, Executive Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Computing - Professor John Doyle, Vice-President for Research - Professor Dominic Elliott, Executive Dean, DCU Business School - Professor Derek Hand, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - Mr John Kilcoyne, Director of Finance - Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean, Institute of Education - Ms Laura Mahoney, Executive Director of External Engagement

			- Dr Declan Raftery, Chief Operations Officer
10:15 - 10:40	Meeting with VPAA reporting head	AG01	- Professor Daire Keogh, DCU President
10:40 - 13:00	PRG private discussion time - final discussion on recommendations	NRF Seminar Room	PRIVATE SESSION
13:00 - 13:45	PRG working lunch and finalisation of exit presentation	NRF Seminar Room	LUNCH
13:45 - 14:00	Briefing with VPAA/Registrar and Director of Quality Promotion on key recommendations	NRF Seminar Room	- Professor Lisa Looney, Vice-President for Academic Affairs - Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion
14:00 - 14:30	PRG Exit Presentation	HG22, Nursing Building	- All OVPAA staff invited to attend