Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Programme

Peer Review Group Report
for Student Support and Development

Mr. Tony Donohoe, Head of Education, Social and Innovation Policy, Irish Business & Employers Confederation (Chair)

Ms. Sue Steging, Head of Student Support, University of Ulster

Mr. Daniel Persaud, Director of Student Support, University of Warwick.

Dr. Malcolm Brady, Head of Management Group, Business School

Ms. Phylomena McMorrow, Director, Registry, Dublin City University (Rapporteur)

Date: 30 May 2012

Introduction

This Quality Review has been conducted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee and complies with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997). The model consists of a number of basic steps.

1. An internal team in the School/Faculty/Office/Centre being reviewed completes a detailed self-assessment report (SAR). It should be noted that this document is confidential to the School/Faculty/Office/Centre as well as the Review Panel and senior officers of the University.

2. This report is sent to a team of peer assessors, the Peer Review Group (PRG) – composed of members from outside DCU and from other areas of DCU – who then visit DCU and conduct discussions with a range of relevant staff, students and other stakeholders.

3. The PRG then writes its own report. The School/Faculty/Office/Centre is given the chance to correct possible factual errors before the Peer Group Report (PGR) is finalised.

4. The School/Faculty/Office/Centre produces a draft Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP) in response to the various issues and findings of the SAR and PGR Reports.

5. The PGR and the draft QuIP are considered by the Quality Promotion Committee.

6. The draft QuIP is discussed in a meeting between the School/Faculty/Office/Centre, members of the Peer Group, the Director of Quality Promotion and members of Senior Management. The University's responses are written into the QuIP, and the result is the finalised QuIP.

7. A summary of the PRG Report, the QuIP including the University's response is sent to the Governing Authority of the University, who will approve publication in a manner that they see fit.

This document is the report referred to in Step 3 above.

Peer Review Group Report

1.   Introduction and Overview

Location

At the time of this review, Student Support and Development (SS&D) comprises eight units. The Careers Service, INTRA, Counselling & Personal Development, Disability & Learning Support, Health Centre, Inter Faith Centre, Sports Development Service and the Student Advice Centre/Central Administration. The majority of these units are located on the ground floor of the Henry Grattan building. The Inter Faith Centre is located adjacent to the Henry Grattan building and the Disability & Learning Support Offices are currently located on the ground floor of the School of Computing Building. In 2007/2008 offices along a corridor on the ground floor of the Henry Grattan building were completely renovated to facilitate a more welcoming environment and central location for the then units of SS&D. Over the past four years the Interfaith Centre has also been fully renovated.

Staff

The Student Advice Centre/Central Administration is at the core of SS&D and encompasses all central administrative functions as well as the role of the Director. Each unit has a Head, with the exception of the Student Health Centre, which is managed by a Nurse and supported by a Medical Director whose services are contracted in to provide GP services in the Centre. The Heads / most senior member of the units, report to the Director, who, in turn reports to the Deputy Registrar / Dean of Teaching and Learning. Staffing within the units is as follows:

Unit	Management	Staff Members
Student Advice Centre / Central Administration	Director of SS&D	1 Secretary, Grade III 1 Snr Admin Assistant II
Careers Service	Head of Service	2 Secretary, Grade II 1 Snr Admin Assist. I (half-time Careers Advisor / half-time Academic Support Officer) 1 Admin I (Careers Advisor)
Counselling & Personal Development	Head of Service	1 Senior Counsellor 1 Secretary, Grade II (half post)
Disability & Learning Support	Head of Service	1 Snr Admin Assistant I 2 Admin Assistants 1 IT Computer Support Tutor (Hourly rate)
Health Centre	Nurse-led	1 Secretary, Grade II
Inter Faith	Head Chaplain	1 Chaplain
INTRA	Head of Service	2 Secretary, Grade II 3 Snr Admin Assistant I
Sports Development	Head of Service	1 Secretary, Grade II (half time)

There is a total of 26 staff working in SS&D and additional resources are used as follows:

- 2 CES[1] members of staff (part-time yearly contracts) in Careers Service, 1 CES member of staff (part-time Inter faith Centre) and 1 CES member of staff (part-time Student Advice Centre)
- Sessional Counsellors (two days per week Nov- April)
- Clinical Placement Programme Counsellors (one day per week for academic year)
- Associate / Voluntary Counsellors (March – June)
- Disability Occupational Therapist (external contract - UniLink)
- GPs (external): 21 hours per week during term time
- 1 Agency Nurse for 10 months of year
- Rugby Development Officer & Soccer Development Officer (15hrs per week each, funded externally)

<u>Product / Processes</u>

The eight units of SS&D provide support and development opportunities for all registered DCU students. Some of the units support the student through difficulties, some focus more on the development of the student through the provision of professional opportunities and others offer a blend of support and development opportunities. SS&D also informs University student policy

2. The Self-Assessment Process

<u>The Co-ordinating Committee</u>

The committee was made up of the most senior member of staff in each of the eight units, plus one further member per unit, ensuring a mixture of grades and roles.

Name	Position in SS&D	Function / Grade
Dr. Claire Bohan (Chair)	Director of SS&D	Director (Associate Professor)
Ms. Yvonne McGowan (Co-Chair)	Sports Development Senior Officer	Head of Service (Admin I)
Ms. Helena Ahern	Counselling & Personal Development	Head of Service (Admin II)
Ms. Geraldine Farrell	INTRA	INTRA Coordinator (Snr Admin I)
Ms. Celine Geraghty	Student Advice Centre / Central Administration	Administration (Sec, Grade III)
Ms. Paula Harrison	Health Centre	Administration (Sec, Grade II)
Fr Joe Jones	Head Chaplain	Chaplain
Sr. Susan Jones	Chaplain	Chaplain
Mr. Ruan Kennedy	Counselling & Personal Development	Snr. Counsellor (Analyst Programmer II)
Ms. Maeve Long	INTRA	Head of Service (Admin II)
Ms. Denise McMorrow	Careers	Careers Advisor (Admin I)
Ms. Marie McNamara	Sports Development / Counselling	Admin (Sec, Grade II)
Ms. Deirdre Moloney	Student Advice Centre	Centre Manager (Snr Admin Ass II)
Ms. Anne O'Connor	Disability & Learning Support	Head of Service (Admin I)
Ms. Marian Scullion	Disability & Learning Support	Administration (Admin Assistant IV)
Ms. Catherine Timmons	Careers	Administration (Sec.II)

[1] CES – Community Employment Scheme (National Scheme funded by FAS)

<u>Methodology adopted during process</u>

The process of self reflection commenced early with two 'away days' for all staff on 26th May and 30th June 2011. A project plan for the Quality Review was drafted. A combination of planning meetings (Chair and Co-Chair of the co-ordinating committee) and meetings of the co-ordination committee were held from June 2011 to March 2012. There were also two meetings with all SS&D staff during the period December 2011 to March 2012 and a further all staff 'away day' on 13th January 2012. Online surveys were used to obtain feedback from DCU staff, student groups and SS&D staff.

3.   The Peer Review Group Process

<u>The Review Group</u>

Mr. Tony Donohoe, Head of Education, Social and Innovation Policy, Irish Business & Employers Confederation (Chair)
Ms. Sue Steging, Head of Student Support, University of Ulster
Mr. Daniel Persaud, Director of Student Support, University of Warwick
Dr. Malcolm Brady, Head of Management Group, Business School
Ms. Phylomena McMorrow, Director, Registry, Dublin City University (Rapporteur)

<u>Site Visit Programme</u>

Wednesday 25 April 2012

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
2.00-3.00pm	First meeting of members of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion.	PRG members Dr. Sarah Ingle	A204
3.00-4.00pm (3.30pm coffee)	Meeting of members of Peer Review Group to: 1. Select Chair of PRG. 2. Confirm suitability of review visit timetable. 3. Agree work schedule and assign tasks for the review visit.	PRG members	A204
4.00-5.15pm	Consideration of Self Assessment Report with members of the Student Support & Development Quality Review Committee	PRG members Dr. Sarah Ingle, Director of Quality Promotion Dr Claire Bohan, Director of SS&D Ms. Deirdre Moloney, Student Advice Centre Manager Ms. Yvonne McGowan, Senior Sports Development Officer Ms. Helena Ahern, Head of Counselling & Personal Development Ms. Maeve Long, Head of INTRA Fr. Joe Jones, Head Chaplain, Inter Faith Centre Ms. Denise McMorrow, Careers Advisor, Careers Unit Ms. Anne O'Connor, Head of Disability & Learning Support	A204
7.00pm	Private working dinner for PRG members	Peer Review Group meet in the Fahrenheit Restaurant	Clontarf Castle

Thursday 26 April 2012

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
8.45 -9.00am	PRG meets privately to discuss morning meetings		CG35
9.00-9.50am	PRG meets with Director of Student Support & Development	Dr. Claire Bohan	CG35
10.00-10.40am	PRG meets with SS&D staff, Heads of Units and others in functional or other groupings, or individually	Ms. Helena Ahern, Head of Counselling & Personal Development Ms. Ruan Kennedy, Senior Counsellor Ms. Anne O'Connor, Head of Disability & Learning Support Ms. Lucy Dendy, Learning Support Officer Ms. Paula Harrison, Administration, Health Centre Ms. Jesse Byrne, Agency Nurse, Health Centre	CG35
10.45–11.15am	Break		CG35
11.15-11.55am	PRG meets with SS&D staff, Heads of Units and others in functional or other groupings, or individually	Dr. Claire Bohan, Director of Student Support & Development Ms. Deirdre Moloney, Student Advice Centre Manager Ms. Celine Geraghty, Administration, Student Advisor Fr. Joe Jones, Head Chaplain Ms. Yvonne McGowan, Senior Sports Development Officer Ms. Marie McNamara, Administration, Sports Development / Counselling & Personal Development	CG35
12.05 -12.45pm	PRG meets with SS&D staff, Heads of Units and others in functional or other groupings, or individually	Ms. Maeve Long, Head of INTRA Ms. Geraldine Farrell, INTRA Coordinator Ms. Vanessa Wade, INTRA Coordinator Ms. Denise McMorrow, Careers Advisor Ms. Yvonne McLoughlin, Careers Advisor Ms. Catherine Timmins, Administration, Careers	CG35
12.45-1.45pm	PRG - Brief discussion with Director of Student Support & Development, if required, followed by working lunch.	PRG	CG35
1.45-2.40pm	Visit to core facilities of SS&D	Dr. Claire Bohan and Ms. Yvonne McGowan to accompany Peer Review Panel around Unit locations	CG35
2.45-3.40pm	Meetings with representative selections of Students, undergrad and post grad, access, traditional and others	**2.45 – 3.00pm** Mr. Ed O'Riordan (Masters in E-Commerce) Mr. Sergio Angulo (MA in International Journalism) Mr. Harish Venugopalan (MA in International Relations) **3.05-3.20pm** Mr. Neil Vago (1st Year, Education & Training) Ms. Ann Reilly (1st Year, Health & Society) Ms. Amanda McDonnell (2nd Year, Psychology) Ms. Elham Osman (3rd Year, Languages for International Communication) Ms. Roisin Sheedy (3rd Year, Contemporary Culture & Society) Mr. Darragh O'Duffy (MSc in Electronic Business) **3.25-3.40pm** Ms. Niamh Coveney (4th Year, Athletic Training & Therapy) Mr. Ovidiu Bernaschi (4th year, Computing Applications)	CG35
3.40-4.00pm	Break		
4.00–4.15pm	Meeting with former Head of Careers	Ms. Muireann Ní Dhuigneáin	

4.15-5.00pm	Meetings with representatives of alumni and employers	**4.15 - 4.35pm** Ms. Nessa Kiely, HR Manager Ernst & Young Ms. Jane Murphy, University Liaison Rep., Google Ms. Shauna Bonner – Deloitte & Touche Mr. Dáithí Mac Lochlainn – SAP Ireland Ms. Sandra Walker - Volkswagen **4.40 – 5.00pm** Mr. Ian McGlynn, DCU Alumni, AF Mr. Megan O'Riordan, DCU Alumni, MINT Mr. Brian Smyth, DCU Alumni, DCUBS Mr. Stephen Murphy, DCU Alumni, Masters in Capital Markets Mr. Paul Martin, DCU Alumni, Electronic Engineering	CG35
5.00–5.30pm	Open invitation for any staff member of SS&D to meet PRG		
5.30–6pm	PRG meets to review and finalise tasks		
7pm	Dinner for members of PRG, staff of Quality Promotion Office and staff of Student Support & Development	PRG members , Dr. Sarah Ingle, Ms. Fiona Dwyer, Dr. Claire Bohan, Ms. Yvonne McGowan, Ms. Deirdre Moloney, Ms. Helena Ahern, Ms. Maeve Long, Ms. Anne O'Connor, Mr. Joe Jones, Ms. Denise McMorrow, Ms. Muireann Ní Dhuigneáin	Clontarf Castle Hotel

Friday 27 April 2012

TIME	ACTIVITY	ATTENDEES	VENUE
9.00-9.55am	PRG meets with members of Senior Management Group (SMG)	Professor Brian MacCraith, President Professor Anne Scott, Deputy President/ Registrar Executive Deans of Faculty Director of Human Resources Director of Finance Executive Director for External and Strategic Affairs	AG01
10.00-10.25am	PRG meets with reporting head for Director of Student Support & Development	Prof. Anne Scott, Deputy President & Registrar, DCU Mr. Billy Kelly, Deputy Registrar and Dean of Teaching & Learning	AG01
10.30-11.00am	Break		CG35
11.00-12.30pm	PRG meets with senior academic / administrative / service / support staff in DCU working with SS&D	**11-11.25:** Prof. Richard O'Kennedy (former VP of Learning Innovation, formerly responsible for SS&D) Dr. Carol Barron (Programme Chairperson, BSc in Nursing) Prof. Barry McMullin (Director of RINCE) Mr. Alan Kennedy (Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, INTRA Liaison) Dr. Niamh O'Sullivan (Programme Chairperson, Actuarial Maths) Dr. Michael O' Connell (INTRA Liaison Biotechnology/ Genetics & Cell Biology) Ms Joanne Lynch (INTRA Liaison DCUBS) **11.30-11.55:** Ms. Niamh McMahon (Deputy Awards Officer, Registry) Ms. Deirdre Kelly (Head of Fees, Finance) Ms. Ellen Breen (Head of Information and Public Services, Library) Mr. Ian Bell (Business Systems & Applications Manager, ISS) Mr. Paul Smith (Director of Equality) Ms. Ita Tobin (Head of Access & Recruitment) Mr. Ray Wheatley (Security Superintendant)	CG35

		12 – 12.25 Mr. Michael Kennedy (Director, GAA Academy) Ms. Una Redmond (Office of Student Life, Manager) Mr. Ed Leamy (President of Students' Union) Mr. Eileen Tully (Head of Health & Safety) Mr. Mike Kelly (Director of Estates) Ms. Goretti Daughton (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences)	
12.30 - 1.00pm	Preparation of PRG exit presentation		CG35
1.00-2.00pm	PRG working lunch		CG35
2.00-4.30pm	Preparation of PRG exit presentation (Coffee 3.30pm)		CG35
4.30-5.00pm	Exit presentation to staff of Student Support & Development to summarise PRG findings	PRG, Director of Quality Promotion, Dr Claire Bohan and other staff of Student Support & Development.	CG12

Methodology

All members of the Peer Review Group (PRG) received a copy of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), relevant appendices, a draft schedule of activities and a notebook containing various useful items of information relating to the Quality Review. This information was provided approximately four weeks prior to the visit. Further information was provided by the Director of Quality Promotion at the first meeting on 25th April. At this meeting Mr. Tony Donohoe agreed to act as the Chair of the PRG.

Given the diversity of the eight units in SS&D it was agreed that the expertise of the individual members of the panel would be used in a manner that ensured appropriate focus was given to each of the units. The PRG were also cognisant that they were reviewing the department as a whole. All members of the PRG attended the meetings on 25th April and the dinner that evening and all members of the group were present at meetings until 4.15 pm on 26th April. At this point Mr. Daniel Persaud had to leave the University and due to exceptional circumstances was unable to return. It was agreed with Daniel Persaud that detailed notes would be provided to him of the meetings he could not attend and he agreed to be fully involved in the writing of the PRG Report.

Schedule of Activity

Members of the PRG discussed the schedule on 25th April and after considering some amendments agreed the draft schedule. One minor change was made on 26th April, primarily due to time, to meet with the former Head of Careers at the final session that day. A comprehensive number of meetings with stakeholders were scheduled. The PRG noted an absence of just one group in the schedule and requested to meet a member of staff from faculty administration. This request was facilitated and a faculty administrative representative attended the meeting at 12 noon on 27th April. The PRG visited all the facilities of SS&D on 26th April.

The PRG adhered, in the main, to a well managed schedule. However, given the diversity of the functions within SS&D and the large number of other stakeholders, the Group found it a constant challenge to juggle the competing demands of meaningful engagement and ensuring that meetings ran to time.

The production of the SAR represented a significant achievement and had required considerable commitment on the part of the Quality Review Committee and the constituent units that make up SS&D. This was obviously an inclusive process with full involvement of all SS&D Staff. Their internal discussions were based on insights from detailed surveys of undergraduates, postgraduates and DCU staff. Therefore, the self-assessment process and ultimately the SAR findings clearly benefited from use of evidence by way of feedback solicited from relevant stakeholders. The hard copies of materials in the Base Room were also useful in providing additional insights into the activities of each unit and cross-unit initiatives.

The PRG was satisfied that the SAR and its Appendices adequately and accurately described activities carried out within the SS&D and sought to honestly explore the strengths and weaknesses of the service. The core Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges analysis has been retained in this report but augmented with the PRG's own external insights and perspectives. The survey results in Appendix 2 provided rich detail, but might have been more easily assimilated with clearer statistical tables.

The use of the Strategic Themes from SS&D's Strategic Plan 2008-2011 provided a cohesive picture of the overarching aims of the service while allowing space for descriptions of individual units. The SAR also includes a list of draft Key Performance Indicators. These require further development in the light of the forthcoming DCU Strategic Plan. The process of developing appropriate performance and impact measures requires further detailed consideration. We explore these issues below.

4.   Findings of the Review Group

Background, Overview, Strategy, Context

A full internal review of the services of SS&D took place in 2007/08 with all staff members feeding into the development of a three year strategic plan (2008-2011). During this period of reducing human and financial resources in the University and an increase in demand for all student services, a strong, cohesive and collaborative Department was formed. The Department has commenced work on a new strategic plan with a focus on both support for individuals and University–wide developments. The consensus of the PRG and SS&D staff was that the draft list of Key Performance Indicators included in the SAR requires further development in light of the forthcoming DCU Strategic Plan.

The PRG debated the relationship and balance between the SS&D's personal support services (e.g. counselling, health, disability and Inter Faith) and development activities (e.g. careers, INTRA and sports) throughout the visit. This debate around the optimum configuration of University services has been on-going internationally and can surface in discussions about appropriate impact metrics and communications strategies. The PRG agreed the SS&D met the UNESCO criteria[2]:

*There is increasing evidence that higher education must address the basic personal needs of students by providing a comprehensive set of out-of-classroom services and programmes commonly referred to as student affairs and services. These efforts should be designed to enable and empower students **to focus more intensely on their studies and their personal growth and maturation, both cognitively and emotionally***. They should also result in enhanced student outcomes. (PRG's emphasis).

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[2] From: The role of student affairs and services in higher education (UNESCO, 2002)

Organisation & Management

Staff expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the management of the Department. It is evident from the SAR and discussions during the site visit that working relationships and communication within and across the eight units are very good. While initially concerned about the diverse range of services included in the structure, the PRG were persuaded through discussion that the current arrangements offer opportunities for a holistic response to the student. There are also incremental opportunities for developing the breadth of individual staff responses to students through immediate learning, de-briefing and the identification of targeted training needs which can be delivered in-house.

There is however, a potential for the combination of limited staffing and ambitious development and service delivery objectives to result in a situation where services depend on personalities rather than systems and that they may become unsustainable as a result.

Staffing and Accommodation

The PRG were impressed with the highly motivated and dedicated group of individuals currently working in SS&D. Staff are encouraged to collaborate where possible and share best practice with each other. It was evident at discussions during the site visit that the SS&D staff have a high standard of professionalism and offer a good quality service. An increase in student numbers coupled with an increase in the demand for individual support from the services is a challenge for the department. Increased use of technology, training and briefings sessions for staff /students and the provision of information to students through group sessions are being used to address this challenge.

Particular concern exists about the use of Community Employment persons in key student facing positions. It was also felt that the arrangements are less than ideal for Counselling Service clients who might have to visit two offices in order to make an appointment. A rationalisation of staffing could remove what is an inappropriately complicated system, especially when the movement takes place in a public access corridor.

Some interviewees still felt that SS&D was not 'visible' enough in a central location on the campus. However the PRG felt that given the overall layout of the campus, it would be very difficult to identify an 'ideal' location. Improved signage and branding would significantly improve the situation.

The Student Advice Centre (SAC) provides a central source of information and advice for all SS&D activities. It is a pleasant and modern space but there may be issues about conducting private business in a public space, especially when interview rooms have glazed panels.

The PRG agreed that the location of the Disability & Learning Support offices in the School of Computing building was not entirely appropriate. While it was recognised that the service provided by this unit is highly regarded by students, it is an absolute requirement of practitioners working in the area of student and disability support to have confidential space for student consultation and the current location and space does not offer this. Its distance from the other offices is not cognate with an inclusive approach to disability. It also limits the potential to share clerical and reception support.

A strength of the Interfaith Centre is the provision of support to all students at the University; those students with faith and those without. DCU is currently leading in the area of multifaith provision. This is the only third level institution that provides an Interfaith Centre of this kind, and the design of the building facilitates a range of activities throughout the year. It was apparent through the secondary materials left for the panel and also the panel's visit to the Centre that the unit is well used. The cafeteria area is in use throughout the day, and whilst the accessibility of the space has to be commended, there can be a

tendency for individuals to occupy the limited space for significant periods. This potentially results in a barrier to others who may wish to use the Interfaith Centre. For this reason, the PRG is recommending the implementation of a stricter usage policy.

Management of Financial and other Resources

SS&D is allocated an annual pay and non-pay budget based on the previous year. In recent years the annual budgets have been reduced in line with the reduction in the overall University budget. In 2010/11 the Health Centre introduced a charge of €10 per GP visit. The PRG had serious concerns about the sustainability of the Health Centre. Given that health accounts for 46% of SS&D's total non-pay budget, there is a significant opportunity cost at a time of constrained resources. Incremental increases in the health centre charge appear almost inevitable. Before this happens, the PRG suggests that a detailed review of the sustainability and configuration of the current arrangements is undertaken.

The PRG noted that students with mental health difficulties are an emerging group. The funding stream to enable mentoring programmes for students with mental health and other difficulties was identified with the Disability and Learning Support team. This can be resourced through the Fund for Students with Disabilities. Therefore the PRG recommends that such a programme is instituted as a matter of urgency.

The Irish Universities Quality Board recommends that the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) (in this instance, the Director of SS&D) is a member of senior management[3]. Therefore the recent introduction of a new reporting structure which means an indirect reporting line for the SS&D Director into senior management was considered by the PRG. Given that the SS&D Director is a member of DCU Executive which, the PRG understands, is the most senior decision making body in the University, the PRG decided not to make a clear recommendation on this issue but the position should be kept under review.

Functions, Activities and Processes

It was evident in the SAR and during the site visit that the size and diversity of the student body has changed in recent years. Over 19% of the undergraduate student population is from non-traditional backgrounds (e.g. mature students, access students and students with disabilities). These changes result in increased demand for more one-to-one consultations and the need for increased levels of support from all eight units. These increases are particularly evident in the Counselling & Personal Development Service, the Disability & Learning Support Service and the SAC. The recession has also had a direct impact on the Department and the increase in demand for services.

All eight units are very well regarded by students and DCU staff. There is clear evidence of collaboration between units and the Department as a whole may be said to provide a secure base for students who are in acute distress as well as for those who wish to engage in a process of personal development. The core team of counsellors is small and attempts have been made to manage demand through assessment and the allocation of ancillary resources through Associate and Trainee Placement arrangements which are supported by clear contractual agreements. The assessment process does complicate the student's progress from initial referral to appointment. Some of the issues relating to this may be addressed by revision of clerical and intake arrangements.

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[3] Good Practice in the Organisation of Student Support Services in Irish Universities (IUQB 2006)

There has been a considerable increase in the number of requests for one-to-one consultations for advice in the areas of academic, exam and financial related matters through the SAC. The support service provided by this small team is currently highly regarded. The PRG was concerned that an increase in numbers seeking advice about such matters could not be met solely by the three individuals offering this service and are recommending that clearer relationships are established with appropriate personnel within the faculties for the referral of academic and exam related matters.

It emerged during the review that SS&D were not always aware of INTRA requirements for new programmes until after the programme approval process has concluded. This sometimes left insufficient time for seeking out placement opportunities, particularly for new areas. Furthermore, the INTRA unit find that it can be difficult to place students in certain industries or with certain backgrounds. Early involvement of SS&D in the programme development process would allow the INTRA unit bring such considerations to the attention of the programme development team.

It was noted by the PRG that the INTRA unit are often able to identify trends in industry ahead of faculties and it seems appropriate for SS&D to bring these to the attention of the relevant faculty as early as possible.

Given DCU's ambition to be the 'University of Enterprise' and initiatives such as *Generation 21*, it is critical that the University continues to build on the success of its careers service and INTRA programme. The concerns expressed in the 2007 Quality Review Report which recommended that 'the plan to integrate INTRA into Student Affairs (SA) is inappropriate, given the business oriented ethos of INTRA and the contrasting pastoral mission of SA'. seem to have been misplaced. Useful synergies between the INTRA and the Careers Unit have started to develop. Indeed, the current PRG considered the complete integration of these two units (employers themselves do not appear to differentiate between the two as a contact point). However, given the academic accreditation of the INTRA and the fact that both units are part of an increasingly cohesive service, there did not appear to be any obvious drawback with the current arrangement. The recent retirement of the long-serving and highly respected Head of Careers in DCU necessitates keeping this position under review.

User Customer/Supplier Perspective

The SAR and the discussions with various groups provided many examples of how SS&D work closely with various other Units and Schools across DCU.

The interactions with students and staff throughout the visit suggested that SS&D staff were highly regarded and that services were effective. In the meeting with senior academic staff there was an imbalance in the staff feedback groups where those connected with INTRA seemed to predominate and there was thus limited opportunity to test the academic perspective on other services.

During the visit, it was obvious that there was excellent communication and co-operation between the eight services. However, it is not safe to assume that there are clear 'pathways' for students to access these services or an understanding of how they all fit together. This reality needs to be acknowledged in communications. One example of this challenge is provided by the role of the Sports Development Service. Its support role is highly regarded by other University services and clubs but its interface with individual students is less clear. For this reason the PRG has recommended the development of an integrated Sports Strategy for the University which accommodates participation at all levels and clarifies the role of the individual components.

Students

Awareness is a constant challenge for all student services and it is a particular challenge to be heard above the general 'noise' of University communications. Overflowing email in-boxes have exacerbated the problem of information overload for students and staff. Therefore the PRG has recommended the development of a distinctive communication and branding strategy. This could include the more imaginative use of technology (e.g. an' app' that provides a clear 'pathway' for students), information provided in more than one format and regular reviews of the effectiveness of promotional material.

Awareness building should be combined with an annual impact report for the senior management team. Further thought should be given to appropriate qualitative and quantitative performance and impact indicators. Usage statistics should not be confused with definitions of success of a service or the quality of that service. Inappropriate quantitative measures can skew the work of support services to produce a positive set of numerical results, which do not capture the quality of the student experience. Feedback surveys are useful but in a community which can suffer from 'survey fatigue', they also have limitations. It is important to capture these data within the management information systems in a way that does not consume the energies of SS&D staff and which assist in directing energies to core functions. Use of multiple databases which are not linked to a central University system or the output of the First Destination Survey make this a particular challenge.

Staff

The IUQB notes that it is important that overall student support is always seen as shared between academic, Student Services and administrative staff. Given students' primary identification with their School or course it is vital that SS&D's development plans have buy in from academic areas in order to avoid the danger of unsustainable student support. On the other hand, academic, administrative, support and technical staff must understand and appreciate the roles of SS&D and the need for the holistic development of students. While the DCU Staff Survey revealed awareness amongst a certain cohort (12% of total staff responded), there is an inevitable element of self-selection in these exercises. The PRG has suggested that SS&D takes the lead in reactivating the Student Experience Committee (using the *Generation 21* initiative to underpin its work).

A deeper appreciation of the SS&D 'development' role, particularly around employability skills, will also be needed if the *Generation 21* initiative is to get real traction amongst academics. Internationally, the attitude of academics to their role in the development of 'employability' skills can range from full recognition through apathy/inertia to antipathy (seen as a threat to academic values). Given its tradition (including the establishment of the INTRA) and the nature of many of its courses, this may not appear to be quite as serious a challenge for DCU. However given the University ambitions, the PRG has developed seven recommendations which it believes will improve business/academic links, strengthen the INTRA programme and inculcate employability skills in the curricula. The Dean of Teaching and Learning will have a key role in championing this agenda amongst DCU's academic community, while there is significant potential to enhance SS&D's role as a conduit between the business and academic community. This could include identification of opportunities for employers to participate on curriculum review panels. DCU alumni provide an important network which could be further utilised in this regard.

Employers

DCU already enjoys a good relationship with employers given the strong tradition of its INTRA and careers services. There was very strong affirmation of this in the PRG's engagement with employers. However, deeper engagement with enterprise is a core

recommendation of the National Strategy for Higher Education (the 'Hunt Report') and the University can anticipate stiffer competition for the attention of employers, whether this is for work placements, involvement in careers awareness activities and employment of its graduates. The indigenous exporting SME sector has been identified by Government as an important source of business growth and the Career and the INTRA units should realign their strategies to take this into account. Given the small number of advisors in the Career's Unit, this could include difficult decisions and clarity around balancing one-to-one inputs and more general awareness building activity amongst both students and employers.

Staff Perspective

The results of the SS&D staff survey and the information provided during the site visit confirmed that staff were very satisfied with their working arrangements. Staff within SS&D are presented with a variety of developmental opportunities and the staff survey results revealed a high engagement by staff in training opportunities.

The PRG had a particular concern regarding the legal exposure and support/guidance for SS&D staff who provide out-of-hours assistance. Appendix 8 of the SAR provides an Emergency Protocol which advises contacting Security and 'at the next possible opportunity' the SS&D Director'. Updated guidelines which reflect actual scenarios encountered by SS&D staff are required.

Overall Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Professionalism and dedication of well trained staff - Flexibility in approach to service provision - Availability of online resources - First Year Orientation and Support - Publications - Feedback in surveys on positive impact of SS&D activities on academic, personal and professional development opportunities - High awareness of services amongst DCU staff - Cross-university involvement in Committees and Working Groups - Strong student-centred ethos at DCU - Director's membership of the DCU Executive - Dynamic leadership provided by the SS&D Director - DCU's reputation for and commitment to sport	- Perception of long lead-in times for appointments - Limited 'Out of hours' provision of services - Limited awareness of *full* range of services of SS&D amongst some students (and some staff) - Insufficient support for distant learning students - Location of Disability & Learning Support offices - Insufficient use of DCU staff network to improve support for students - Lack of evidence of demand of these services from all students - Lack of defined student 'pathway' to support and development services - Uneven implementation of DCU personal tutor system - Use of temporary staff in key customer facing positions - Multiple information management systems which are not linked to a central University system
Opportunities	**Concerns**
- Increased competence in / use of technology by staff members - Generation 21 initiative - Development of KPIs for services - Development of academic skills support - Increased cross-unit collaboration and use of 'triaging' to support the student more seamlessly - Further development of CRM for Events Management and as a Reporting tool - Emerging DCU strategy especially the student experience strand - Utilise DCU's reputation and expertise to deepen links with business community	- Increase in demand for one-to-one services - Increase in complexity of student issues - Increase in diversity of student body - Decreased funding - Staff Embargo - Fewer work placement opportunities - Perception of students regarding access to immediate delivery of services vis-à-vis increased Student Registration Fee - New reporting structure means indirect reporting lines into Senior Management - Securing communication networks within the University and assuring buy in to development plans - External environment increasing psychological and economic pressure on students - Information overload amongst students and staff - Difficulty in measuring and demonstrating the impact of SS&D - Hunt report will drive increased competition from other higher education institutions for work placement opportunities - Academic resistance to extension of accreditation scheme to employability skills - Managing the boundaries with other DCU student services (e.g. Office of Student Life, personal tutor system)

5. Recommendations for Improvement

Indication of Priority:

- P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.

- P2: A recommendation that is important, but can, or perhaps must, be addressed on a more extended time scale.

- P 3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities.

Level(s) of the University where action is required:

- A: Area under review (Student Support & Development)
- U: University Senior Management

No.	P1, P2, P3	U, A	Recommendation
1	P1	U	Develop an integrated sports strategy for the University
2	P1	U	Provide guidance to SS&D staff about possible liabilities associated with providing advice and intervention out of hours
3	P1	U	Commission guidelines for the safe management of personal emergencies on campus and out of hours
4	P1	A	Immediate attention should be given to recruiting mental health mentors
5	P1	A	Review of online registration arrangements for Counselling and Personal Development, so they are not undertaken in public areas
6	P1	A	Take the lead in reactivating the student experience committee with at view to developing a coherent and visible pathway to the network of support arrangements for students at all stages of the student life cycle
7	P1	A	Process information gathered through SS&D systems in order to develop a clear focus on student issues and effective responses
8	P1	A	Careers Service should develop a plan for targeting the SME sector for future career opportunities
9	P1	A	Undertake a review of clerical support across the department including the use of temporary contracts
10	P1	A	Provide early alerts to faculties when placement opportunities appear to be diminishing
11	P1	A	Improve and increase the use of signage to signal the commonality among the various SS&D units distributed around campus
12	P1	U & A	The INTRA unit should be made aware of upcoming new programmes, with an INTRA content, to allow unit to advise on work placement implications

13	P2	U & A	Commission a detailed review of the sustainability of the current Health Centre service arrangement in consultation with the Director of Student Support and Development
14	P2	U & A	Further develop the role between employers and the academics in relation to issues such as curriculum development and academic/business linkages
15	P2	U	Consider moving the Disability and Learning Support Service to a location which assures safe and ethical practice
16	P2	A	Careers Service should consider the split of activity between careers support for individual students and development of employability skills among the student body
17	P2	A	Careers Service and INTRA programme should consider ways to further use INTRA connections as entry routes for students into industry
18	P2	A	Consider ways to further collaborate with faculties to include career development/employability skills in the curriculum
19	P2	A	Introduce a cafeteria usage management system in the Interfaith Centre
20	P2	A	Develop clearer relationships with faculties for the referral of academic and exam related matters
21	P2	A	Produce an annual impact report of the work of SS&D
22	P2	A	Develop a distinctive communication and branding strategy
23	P2	A	Development of KPIs for SS&D should be deferred until they can be fully aligned with the forthcoming DCU strategy
24	P2	A	Consider offering training on student problems and referral methods to programme directors and personal tutors

End.