# Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement

# Internal Quality Review Programme

# 2012 -2016



## Quality Improvement Plan

### *Oscail*

Revised following launch of the National Institute for Digital Learning

17 June 2014

**Contents**

# 1.     INTRODUCTION

The Oscail Peer Review Group (PRG) reported in March 2012. Based on the recommendations in its report, a Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP) was developed by the Oscail Quality Review Team and submitted in September 2012. Since the University's Strategic Plan 2012-2017 *Transforming Lives and Societies* was about to be launched the following month and given that the Plan contains specific projects that have direct relevance to the functions of Oscail, the DCU Senior Management decided to delay the consideration and approval of the QuIP until such time as those specific projects could be set in train. In particular, the Plan envisaged the development of a '21st Century Digital Campus' which, coupled with the outputs of our National Centre [Institute] for Digital Learning, will support pioneering, technology-enhanced learning and revolutionise the learning experience both for Campus-based Education and Distance Education".

It was also envisaged that Oscail, and the Learning Innovation Unit (LIU), now the Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU), would become integral and vital parts of the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL). In February 2014, Professor Mark Brown joined DCU as its first Chair in Digital Learning and Director of NIDL. One of Prof. Brown's first tasks was to revisit the Oscail QuIP and address the recommendations of the PRG as outlined in its report.


# 2.     RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

The responses presented in this section represent the views of the University as a whole. Therefore, there are no additional responses being offered by the University.


## Recommendations

The following notation is used in the recommendations for improvement.
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.
P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the Area.

Additionally, the Peer Review Group (PRG) indicates the level(s) of the University where action is required:
A:  Area under review; U: University Senior Management

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | P1 | U | Articulate a clear vision for the development of Distance Education within the University. | The University has made significant progress in articulating a clear vision for Distance Education, as evidenced by the DCU Strategic Plan 2012-2017 *Transforming Lives and Societies* and the VOLG (Virtual and On-line Learning Group [presented in June 2012], a DCU internal *ad hoc* working group) report [presented in August 2008]. The Strategic Plan states that DCU will "Develop a '21st Century Digital Campus' which, coupled with the outputs of our National Centre [Institute] for Digital Learning, will support pioneering, technology-enhanced learning and revolutionise the learning experience both for Campus-based Education and Distance Education." (p.21). Towards this end, in November 2014, DCU launched the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL). At the launch, DCU President, Professor Brian MacCraith, gave the University's vision for the new Institute: "The launch of NIDL underscores DCU's commitment to optimising the learning experience of our students, whether they are on campus or studying in distance mode." <br><br> In February 2014, Professor Mark Brown joined DCU as its first Chair in Digital Learning and Director of the National Institute. NIDL encompasses both Oscail and the Learning Innovation Unit (LIU) under a revised organisational structure. These developments, coupled with the forthcoming launch of a new brand which encompasses distance education, along with an overarching brand for DCU's digital learning platform, provide tangible evidence of the University's commitment to building a 21st Century Digital Campus seamlessly supporting both on-campus and off-campus students. |

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | P1 | U & A | Identify, in collaboration, the best role for Oscail in delivering DCU's vision for Distance Education. | Oscail has a number of strengths in supporting the unique needs of distance learners and many of these will be crucial in operationalising the vision of developing a modern $21^{st}$ Century Digital Campus. Although Oscail has been rebranded as the Open Education Unit (OEU) under the NIDL to reflect DCU's wider vision for the future of online, blended and distance learning, the basic internal operations have been retained as the University expands the number of fully online programmes. The experience of developing additional programmes in collaboration with several partner institutions will be invaluable in identifying the most appropriate role for the OEU. The strategy is to position OEU so that it can evolve as new business and production models emerge to play a leading role in supporting DCU to take advantage of the affordances of new digital technologies for distance education—both nationally and internationally. |
| 3 | P1 | U | Capitalise on the expertise which exists within Oscail to establish DCU as the National Leader in the provision of Distance Education. | The establishment of the NIDL (with its size, structure and vision) and the appointment of a new Director is evidence of DCU's commitment to capitalising on the expertise within Oscail to become the national leader in online, blended and distance learning. The constituent *Teaching and Learning Strategy (2014)* released in February states the objective of accelerating "…development of blended and online learning and national leadership in digital learning through our development and research initiatives" (p.2). Already the NIDL has established a profile, evidenced by the number of invitations the Director has received to speak at national and international events, developed a Strategic Plan (2014-2016) and draft Priorities Initiatives Plan, and established a Digital Learning Research Network consisting of Institute staff and approximately 25 people distributed around faculties. More information about the NIDL and more specifically the Research Network is available on the new website [http://www.dcu.ie/nidl/index.shtml]. |

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| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | P1 | A | Drive to conclusion the current change process with which Oscail is currently engaged. | Before the establishment of the NIDL in November 2013, organisational change in Oscail was on-going. New organisational structures had been put in place in April 2012. All members of Oscail's full-time staff were located in one of the four operational groups. In addition, the management, marketing and continuous improvement groups were fully operational by the beginning of 2013. The required training and upskilling of staff was also set in train. A review of the new structures and processes was carried out in October/November 2012 to ensure they were assisting Oscail in meeting its strategic goals. A key outcome of this review was an agreed mechanism to determine composition of the four operational groups.

A second review took place in October 2013. A key outcome was that the Oscail Teaching and Learning Committee took on an overview role of all work processes within Oscail. Also, in the interests of transparency and communication, it was decided that all members of staff were to be invited to Teaching and Learning Committee meetings.

In addition, a Registration Working Group was formed to address issues with the registration process. Also, an Information Technology (IT)/Risk Working Group and a Health and Safety Advisory group were formed. Under NIDL the revised committee and organisational structures will be refined in order to most effectively support DCU's vision and expanded role of the National Institute. |

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | P1 | U & A | Confirm a clear commitment not to damage the current provision and the product offered to off-campus, distance education students. | DCU is committed to offering high quality learning experiences for all students irrespective of location. The Strategic Plan 2012-2017 *Transforming Lives and Societies* articulates this commitment along with the constituent *Teaching and Learning Strategy* launched in February 2014. Notably, the *Teaching and Learning Strategy (2014)* states: "The NIDL will pioneer major developments in online, distance and blended learning, exploiting the full range of digital technologies to provide students with the best possible learning experience, whether on or off campus" (p.16). <br><br> So, rather than seeking to limit "damage to current provision and the product offered", DCU's intention is to enhance existing products and services and where appropriate expand the number of programme offerings in areas of strategic importance. For example, work is currently underway in developing a fully online Masters in Biomedical Diagnostics and several other online initiatives, which target distance learners, are in the early stages of planning. |

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | P2 | U & A | Expand and refine the role of Oscail so that at University level there is a clear function responsible for the marketing, management and delivery of distance education in a single unit and also an academic centre for research and scholarship in Distance Education.  This academic centre should build international links with other research centres and distance education networks. | This recommendation has two distinct elements: The first element recommends a single unit "responsible for the marketing, management and delivery of distance education". Because of the different market to which it is aiming its programmes (i.e. primarily off-campus working adults studying part-time), DCU understands the need for distinct and targeted marketing of online distance education programmes.  However, the evolution of DCU's wider strategy of developing a 21$^{st}$ Century Digital Campus (physical & virtual) is likely to warrant ongoing consideration of this recommendation with regards to management and delivery of such programmes.  While the University envisages that the NIDL will be centrally involved in the management and delivery of online distance education programmes, it is likely that different models will evolve depending on the different circumstances of online offerings. Already DCU's strategic partnership with Arizona State University and offshore initiatives in other countries have shown the benefits of exploring alternative management and delivery models, especially in the case of transnational activities.

The second element relates to building international links with other research centres. One of the key tasks of the NIDL will be to conduct leading-edge research in the area of digital learning, technology-enhanced learning and learning analytics.  In this context, the NIDL will build links with relevant research centres and distance education networks.  This work has already commenced. For example, Professor Grainne Conole, a world expert in digital learning from the University of Leicester, has accepted a position as an Adjunct Professor within the NIDL. In addition, the NIDL will establish during 2014 an international advisory board of leading scholars in the area to support research activities. The NIDL has also renewed and extended its membership of peak professional bodies and recently re-joined the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE). |

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | P2 | U & A | Design and implement systems and incentives to ensure DCU Faculties engage with this Distance Education mission. The ultimate academic responsibility for all DCU programmes should lie with the DCU academic entity where the most relevant, cognate, expertise resides (even where this continues to involve external academic partners). | This recommendation also has two distinct elements: In regard to the design of systems and incentives to ensure Faculties engage with Distance Education, from 2010, Oscail's strategy was, whenever possible, to work with academics from the Schools/Faculties and linked colleges of DCU. However, a directive in 2012 from the HEA that second contracts cannot be given to full-time members of staff provided an opportunity to develop new design and delivery models which more fully embed online distance education within the academic culture of DCU. With this opportunity in mind, DCU's senior management is currently working on ways to encourage faculty to strategically engage in online distance learning within the parameters of current funding and workload allocation models. Working in partnership with faculties, the NIDL will play an important role in exploring the potential of different models. In addition, one of the research strands of the NIDL is to establish the wider public benefits of supporting part-time adult learners through more flexible delivery models. As the HEA (2009) position paper on Open and Flexible Learning concluded, "If open and distance learning is to be used increasingly by conventional institutions, funding for programmes of this type need to be harmonised with funding mechanisms for traditional/conventional programmes" (p.7). The long-term solution to the question of appropriate incentives requires a national policy change and the NIDL will champion this issue.

In regards to academic responsibility, DCU fully supports the principle that responsibility for programmes should reside with the relevant academic entity. While current DCU approval and accreditation processes ensure that faculties and schools are engaged in decisions about the delivery of academic programmes, this is an on-going discussion, particularly since the establishment of the NIDL, with a view to finding the most appropriate arrangements. |

| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | P1 | U & A | Deliver significant, coordinated and ongoing investment in IS hardware and software in order to ensure the ongoing success of Distance Education at DCU. This investment must be aligned to the DCU strategy for Distance Education. | The University is at present engaged in high-level negotiations with a strategic IT partner, with the intention of significantly enhancing current infrastructure. Moreover, in 2013 a major upgrade was implemented to Moodle with enhanced functionality and DCU apps were launched for all staff and students. Work is currently underway to develop an overarching brand for DCU's digital learning platform and a new software licence for a more fit for purpose synchronous delivery tool is expected to be available by the start of the new academic year.<br><br>The University is currently developing strategies for Information Systems (IS) and Information Technology (IT). Both of these will address the requirements and plans of the NIDL and, in their implementation, facilitate NIDL's long-term development. |
| 9 | P3 | U & A | Reorganise office space in Bea Orpen building so that Oscail staff are clustered together. | In regard to the reorganisation of office space in the Bea Orpen building, DCU acknowledges the value of clustering staff together. Although there have been several unsuccessful efforts since late 2012 to find a solution, the issue of appropriate office space is a high priority in the establishment plan for the NIDL. This matter has taken on even greater strategic importance with the expanded cluster of staff under the umbrella of the NIDL. The first phase of reorganisation commenced at the end of March 2014 with some minor office reallocation. However, phases 2 and 3 will be more complex as they will probably require structural refurbishments and negotiations with other university stakeholders. The reorganisation of office space also needs to align with the current Incorporation Process between DCU and its linked colleges.<br><br>The University is finalising a major Campus Development Plan that will address the space needs of NIDL and other significant, related large-scale projects. |

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| No | Priority | Addressee | PRG Recommendation (Provided in PRG Report) | NIDL Response |
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| 10 | P1 | U | Assign a member of the Senior Management Group to drive the development and implementation of the DCU distance education Mission, Vision and Strategies. | DCU has appointed Professor Mark Brown as Director of NIDL. The Director is a member of high-level university committees and work is underway in developing a strategy for DCU's vision of a 21$^{st}$ Century Digital Campus for both on and off-campus students. |
| 11 | P2 | U & A | Develop a coherent plan to attract research funding in relation to policy and practice regarding off-campus and digitally enhanced higher education. | As noted above, this is a key role of the new NIDL. The structure of the NIDL includes a Digital Learning Research Network which will harness the expertise and research interests of staff throughout the University. The constituent *Research and Innovation Strategy (2014)* provides an excellent overarching framework for the NIDL and several key research strands have already been identified to ensure future research activities are strategically aligned with national priorities. |

## 3.   SUMMARY OF THE ONE-YEAR PLAN

The development of a one-year plan for Oscail is no longer relevant given reorganisation following the establishment of the National Institute for Digital Learning. A Strategic Plan (2014-2016) for the NIDL has recently been developed which includes a vision "To be recognised as a world leader at the forefront of education, research and innovation in contemporary models of teaching and learning that help transform lives and societies" (See Appendix 1).

Work is also currently underway to develop a Priorities Initiatives Plan for activities over the next 18 months for each of NIDL's strategic objectives. A key component of this plan is the forthcoming launch and implementation of the new brand for what was previously known as Online/Distance Education. The new brand will indicate quite clearly how DCU intends to position online and distance learning as a core part of the student learning experience.

## 4.   SUMMARY OF THE THREE-YEAR PLAN

The development of a three-year plan for Oscail is no longer relevant given reorganisation following the establishment of the National Institute for Digital Learning. The new NIDL Strategic Plan (2014-2016), which includes strategic objectives relevant to the Open Education Unit, provides a strong integrated framework for future developments over the next three years.

**Appendix 1:**

**National Institute for Digital Learning Strategic Plan (2014-2016)**

**Vision:**
To be recognised as a world leader at the forefront of education, research and innovation in contemporary models of teaching and learning that help transform lives and societies.

**Mission:**
To design, implement and evaluate transformative models of teaching and learning by providing strategic leadership, enabling and contributing to world-class research, and promoting academic and operational excellence.

**Strategic Principles:** Enterprise, Engagement, Translation, Transformation

**Strapline:** Listening | Linking | Leading

**Strategic Objectives:**

The following strategic objectives align with the University's Strategic Plan (2014-2017) and constituent strategies:

1. To provide core teaching enhancement services that support academic excellence.
2. To provide strategically targeted teaching enhancement services that support academic excellence in the design and effective use of digital learning in all delivery modes.
3. To support academic and operational excellence in planning and implementing a sustainable 21st Century Digital Campus.
4. To support operational excellence in the marketing and administration of courses and related support services available to students studying through flexible delivery modes.
5. To promote academic excellence in the teaching, implementation and evaluation of courses available to learners studying through flexible delivery modes.
6. To develop strategic partnerships which enhance access to high quality university level education both nationally and internationally.
7. To champion, celebrate and share academic and operational excellence in teaching, learning and assessment practices.
8. To foster a network of leaders and strong communities of practice at the forefront of conducting, supporting and disseminating research in digital learning.
9. To engage strategically with professional bodies and key external stakeholders in order to influence policy and benchmark the effective use of digital learning against international best practices.
10. To develop a positive team environment and high performance culture of operational and academic excellence commensurate with the Health and Safety Policy where all staff make a significant contribution to the University.

**Appendix 2: Area Quality Committee (for the Self-Assessment Report)**

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|---|---|
| Dr Anne Morrissey | Programme Chair – Postgraduate programmes. |
| Mr Seamus Fox | Head of Oscail |
| Ms Michelle Brennan | Programme Support Manager |
| Dr James Brunton | Programme Chair – Humanities Programmes |
| Mr Eamon Costello | Programme Chair – IT programmes |
| Mr Paul Moore | Information and Technology Administration |
| Ms Maree Ralph | Student Services Manager |
| Ms Elaine Walsh | e-Learning Support Specialist/BA Programme Academic Team |

**Appendix 3: Peer Review Group members**

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|---|---|
| Dr. Conor Galvin | (Chairperson) School of Education, University College Dublin |
| Mr. Gerry Walsh | Managing Director, Iridium Ventures Ltd |
| Mr. Piet Henderikx | Secretary-General, European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) |
| Prof. Barry McMullin | Electronic Engineering, Dublin City University |
| Dr. Caroline McMullan | (Rapporteur), Business School, Dublin City University |

**Appendix 4: Area Quality Committee (for the Quality Improvement Plan)**

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|---|---|
| Dr Anne Morrissey | Programme Chair – Postgraduate programmes. |
| Mr Seamus Fox | Formerly Head of Oscail, now Head of Open Education Unit |
| Dr James Brunton | Programme Chair – Humanities Programmes |
| Mr Eamon Costello | Programme Chair – IT programmes |
| Mr Paul Moore | Information and Technology Administration |
| Ms Maree Ralph | Student Services Manager |
| Ms Elaine Walsh | e-Learning Support Specialist/BA Programme Academic Team |

**Appendix 5: Prioritised Resource Requirements**

The NIDL has a two-year establishment budget that is available to help resource the Strategic Plan and the related priority initiatives, including the launch and implementation of appropriate branding and further enhancements to the current digital learning platform.