Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Programme for Administrative Units 2003-2004

Peer Review Group Report for the Human Resources Department

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1. Profile of the HR Department

<u>1.1 Location of the Unit</u>

The HR department is housed on the (255m^2) top floor of the Administration building, which also includes Main Reception and the Finance Office, and is located adjacent to the main entrance to DCU. The office space comprises nine private or shared offices, a large open plan office, an interview room and a HR reception and enquiries area. The reception and enquiries area also comprises the office space for four administrative staff. The large open plan office is located in what was hitherto the Training Room.

<u>1.2 Staff</u>

There are currently sixteen staff employed in the HR department comprising of the Director, HR Manager, Training & Development Officer, FOI Officer/HR officer, 5 HR Officers and six admin support staff.

Number of full-time, part-time and contract staff.

	Permanent	Temporary*/Contract	Total
Full-time	10	5	15
Part-time	1**		1
Total	11	5	16

* Includes one Permanent staff member on temporary secondment to HR
**This is a job-share where the other job sharer is not working within HR

<u>1.3 Overview of Processes and Services</u>

HR Functions*, Activities & Processes can be categorised under the following broad headings:

1. Policy Development & participation at senior management level
2. Recruitment & Selection of Staff
3. Training & Development
4. Employee Relations
5. Industrial Relations
6. General Administration

*The HR Department staff complement also currently includes the Freedom of Information Officer, although this is not a HR function.

1. Policy Development and participation at senior management level

The HR department is involved in developing employment policies for the University including the University's campus companies and research centres. Existing policies are updated in the light of new legislation such as Freedom of Information Act, the Employment Equality Act and the Protection of Employment (Fixed Term Working) Act. The Director of Human Resources is a member of the University Executive and the senior management team of DCU. The Director is also a member of the Budget Committee, which approves decisions relating to the overall university budget.

2. Recruitment & Selection of Staff

Recruitment of staff is a primary function of the department working through set procedures for recruiting staff and involving close work with the heads of the Schools and Units. The HR department's involvement currently covers all stages of recruitment; from advertising through short-listing, interviewing, candidate selection and contract issue.

3. Training & Development

In 1999 a specialist HR officer was assigned dedicated responsibility for the development of a training and development policy and for the administration and financing of the many staff development courses that are run throughout the year. This function continues to develop according to the University's needs.

4. Employee Relations

While there are recognised formal routes for Industrial Relations (see below) the HR department also deal with cases on a less formal basis. HR Officers advise local managers on HR Policies and Procedures and their effective implementation within Schools and Units. The HR Officers act in an advisory capacity to local management in the event of grievances or disputes arising in the workplace. The HR Officers also have a role in dealing with long term absenteeism due to illness, often referring staff to occupational health physicians. The HR department also provides interventions to Schools and Units covering issues such as team building, management of change and improvements to interpersonal working relationships. This work is not publicised due to the sensitive nature of the issues addressed.

5. Industrial Relations

This area encompasses the traditional role of industrial relations through negotiations with the staff trade union (SIPTU) together with issues arising through the University grievance procedures, mediation services and a new partnership committee which aims to progress issues of mutual benefit to staff and management in a non adversarial setting. DCU is a single union closed shop, permanent staff members must be members of SIPTU while temporary staff have an option to join the union or not.

6. General Administration

This area deals with the administration of:
- Increments
- Pensions
- Leave
- Payroll changes (in conjunction with the Finance Office)
- Staff records
- Archiving, and the
- Procurement of work permits.

The Finance Office, based on information received from HR, carries out the payroll function.

This area of operations has grown rapidly with the increase in staff numbers over the past five years leading to the introduction of a custom contract management system which has developed into a general HR database called C-docs.

2. The Self-Assessment Process

2.1 The Co-ordinating Committee

- Marian Burns, Director of HR.
- Joe Maxwell, Quality Review Co-ordinator.
- Martin Leavy/Sorcha Kelly, Training & Development.
- Norma Wilkinson/Emer McMahon, HR Officers
- Brenda Dempsey/Mary Donnelly, HR Officers.
- Patricia Rochford/Elaine McGuirk, Secretarial Support.

2.2 Methodology Adopted

Following two briefings for all HR staff in June, the HR Department Quality Review Committee met for the first time on June 25th 2003. The committee met three more times up to October 2003 at which point the Quality Review became a standing item on the agenda of the weekly departmental meeting. There was also a session in November at which staff gave presentations on their work; this was used as the basis of the HR staff view of functions, activities and processes in the Self Assessment Report (SAR). There were also two facilitated away days in January 2004 at which the first draft report was considered by all staff. The November presentations, the integration of the Quality Review into regular meetings, the away days and consultation on the final report were key factors in engaging all staff in the review and successfully ensuring very good levels of communication around the process within the department.

While there was a single dedicated review co-ordinator who organised data gathering and wrote the report, all HR staff contributed through the preparation of essays on their area of work, presentations and completion of the HR staff survey. Staff were very happy with their level of input and found the process very enlightening through the requirement for reflection on and review of their own activities.

In the view of the Peer Review Group the method adopted was appropriate, effective and very inclusive.

3. The Peer Review Group (PRG) Process

3.1 Site Visit Programme

Wednesday March 10th 2004	
14.00	Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion.
14.30	Private meeting of Peer Review Group
15.30	Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with Unit Quality Committee
20.00	*Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Head of Unit and Unit Quality Co-ordinating Committee*
Thursday March 11th 2004	
8.30	Peer Review Group meet and review the schedule for the day
9.30	Meeting with HR Management Team (4)
11.00	Meeting with HR Officers (6)
12.30	Meeting with General Office staff (6)
13.30	Lunch
14.00	Meeting with Senior Staff
15.00	Meeting with Administrative Staff and Lecturing Staff
16.15	Meeting with Mixed Staff group
17.30	Meeting with University Secretary
19.30	*Working private dinner for PRG (cancelled by PRG)*
Friday March 12th 2004	
8.30	Peer Review Group meet and review the schedule for the day
9.00	Meeting with Senior Officers of the University
10.00	Report Drafting
12.00	Meeting with Head of Unit for any required clarification
13.00	Meeting with Director of Quality Promotion
13.30	Lunch
14.00	Report Drafting
16.00	Exit Presentation

3.2 Methodology

This Peer Review Group report is based on the number of sources. These include:
- The Human Resources Department Self Assessment Report and Appendices (Policies and Procedures; Staff details; Questionnaires and results; and Training and Development programme).
- Discussions held with Staff in the HR Department and other DCU staff including Senior Management during the course of the visit
- Copies of other reports provided during the visit including: ShaPe; Presentation to Governing Authority and the Equality Audit report.

Mr. Jim Duffy was elected Chairperson of the Peer Review Group and took specific responsibility for reviewing the information systems and the use of information within the HR Department.
Ms Paula E Zagora took specific responsibility for reviewing training and development and work life balance issues.
Ms Margaret Ramsay took responsibility for reviewing recruitment and selection processes.
Prof. Kathy Monks took responsibility for reviewing HR Strategy.
Ms Margaret O'Flanagan was rapporteur for the group and also undertook to review issues relating to internal and external communications.

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In addition to the matters for which members took specific responsibility, the group as a whole took an overall view of the issues emerging through the process. The report was written based both on collective and independent work during the course of the Review visit. The report was written by the rapporteur based on points agreed before the exit presentation and then shared among the group for review and editing before submission to the Director of Quality Promotion.

3.3 Overview of the Site Visit

The site visit began at 14.00 on Wednesday 10th of March with a briefing by the Director of Quality Promotion. The group elected Mr. Jim Duffy as Chair of the PRG. Margaret O'Flanagan of DCU was accepted as the rapporteur for the group. The group identified key skill and interest areas and assigned responsibility for focussing on specific functions to each member of the group. Following and initial meeting with the Unit Quality Committee that afternoon, the informal dinner that evening provided a broad platform for understanding the cultural, sectoral and local norms affecting all participants in the process.

On the second day of the visit the PRG met with three groups covering all staff within the HR Department; starting with the Management team, followed by the HR Officers and concluding with the general office staff. These meetings were followed after lunch with three separate sessions with; Senior University staff (School and Unit Heads as well as Deans), Administrative staff covering a range of activities and levels along with two lecturing staff, and finally a mixed group of administrative and academic staff. The issues covered reflected those raised within the Self Assessment Report. A brief informal tour of the facilities within the Unit took place just before lunch and included a more in-depth review of the IT systems in place. The final meeting of the day was with the University Secretary who has oversight of the HR Department.

The final day of the visit began at 9am when the PRG met the Senior Officers of the University, excluding the President who was abroad but who had answered queries via email overnight. The meeting focussed on the strategic aims and direction of the HR function within DCU. The PRG then worked on the report and had a final clarification meeting with the Unit Head. The day concluded with an exit presentation, which began at 16.00 and concluded at 17.00.

While some of the meetings ran over their scheduled time, this could not have been anticipated at the time the schedule was developed and reflected a desire shared by all concerned to explore specific issues emerging. The timetable was well scheduled and laid out. The flexibility of the staff within the HR Department in rescheduling sessions was very helpful in ensuring that key issues were adequately covered.

All of those participating in the meetings, HR staff and other DCU staff, engaged very effectively with the process. There was obviously a keen interest in the functions and methods of the HR Department.

3.4 Overall Comments on the Visit

The HR Self Assessment Report, along with practical support materials, was sent out to all members of the PRG to schedule and well in advance of the actual review visit, giving the reviewers ample time to assess the content. Additional support materials in the form of recent reports were provided as supporting documentation during the review visit.

Liaison provided by the HR department was excellent. In addition to a very helpful primary contact, who responded to all queries and requests promptly and effectively, support and advice were always available, throughout the visit, from all HR staff.

The Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) provided the PRG with all the required practical information and support to proceed with the review. The QPU liaison was excellent, especially the innovation of providing the PRG with a mobile phone for the duration of the review. QPU staff were extremely helpful throughout the review.

3.5 Review Group's view of the Self-Assessment Report

The HR Department's Self Assessment Report was thorough and included an analysis of all key activities within the Unit. An inclusive approach was adopted with participation by all HR Department staff in the process. The report indicated that the quality review process had lead to increased awareness and understanding within the department of its strengths and weaknesses. This has provided a basis on which to develop plans for the future.

The PRG noted that a number of reviews of the HR Dept had recently been undertaken, including the Equality Audit, the SHAPE Report and the Jemstone Report but time did not permit the PRG to consider any of the findings of these reviews in their original.

The report would have benefited from more detailed analysis of the data, including statistical analysis and interpretation of trends over time.

4. Findings of the Review Group

4.1 Background and Context

The HR Department has undergone very substantial change in recent years, including the appointment of a new Director. The change in the department's name indicates a move away from a concentration on personnel management issues towards one that is focused more on human resource management. Increasing staff numbers and changes in DCU's structure have also impacted significantly on the role of the department. The department faces further change in the light of new legislation and the planned introduction of a performance management scheme.

4.2 Frequent issues arising

The key issues that emerged suggest that there is a need for greater cohesion within the department, better analytical backup and a stronger strategic vision. Both from the report itself and the feedback from stakeholders, the PRG has identified a need to continue to develop the cohesion of the Unit particularly in the light of the growth of the team and recent restructuring. There is clear evidence of the success of individuals but the group felt that more focussed working together might give the Department more than the sum of its separate parts. In moving forward, more data collection and analysis of data is required in order for the Department, and the University, to see and understand underlying trends. Finally, while the HR Strategic plan is clearly structured, the Peer Review Group feel that it falls short of a vision for transforming the HR Function.

4.3 Peer Review Group Observations and Recommendations

The Self Assessment Report includes a number of useful practical recommendations for improvement made by the HR Department itself. The majority of these are amenable to speedy implementation and the PRG recommends that the HR Department act on them as soon as is feasible. Through the process of the review, based on the divisions of the Self Assessment Report and priority areas identified by the Peer Review Group, seven key elements of the HR Department's activities emerged as themes for development. These were:

1. Communications
2. Information and Systems
3. Performance Management
4. Recruitment Processes
5. HR strategy
6. Training and Development
7. Work Life Balance

Communications
Improved internal and external communications are needed to optimise the activities of the HR Department and to improve service quality but also to advertise existing service quality and range to potential users within the University. Some of these improvements are already in train. Significant progress in relation to communicating key services of the department to staff and management has been made through the SELF programme and this should be developed further.

Information and Systems
There is a need for significant improvement in the capacity to store and analyse HR related information within the Department. There is also a need to improve the storage and dissemination of decisions made and standard advice given to ensure a consistent, high quality, information service.

Performance Management
While the HR department is aware that the introduction of a Performance Management System may solve some current problems, the department should also be aware that it will also bring new pressures and cannot be expected to resolve all current difficulties.

Recruitment Processes
Streamlining is required with regard to recruitment processes. While new processes may need to be introduced to ensure a clearly equitable system, existing processes also need to be reviewed with specific reference to resource requirements and timeframes in particular.

HR Strategy
It is recognised that the HR strategic plan is only in its early stages of development. At this stage the plan is more a set of activities and lacks an integrated focus. Both the HR department and the University need to refine their vision of the future role and contribution of the department. The position of the HR Director to influence University policy and planning, through her membership of the senior management team, places the HR department is a strong strategic position.

Training and Development
The Training and Development function is developing rapidly and attention needs to be paid to this key strategic function. While there will be additional information on training requirements coming from the Performance Management system, this cannot be relied upon as the sole source of information for a training needs assessment.   A formal, comprehensive needs assessment, possibly in concert with a consultant, should be undertaken. The results of this assessment can determine the strategies for the training and development function going forward.

Up to now, the training and development function has focused on training, not development, mostly due to lack of resources. As more requests for interventions on organisation structure and design along with accompanying staff skill requirements are received, the department strategy needs to include how to handle this growing campus demand.

A third component facing Training and Development is the need to focus on what training, in particular, is required to support staff in their career development.

Work Life Balance
There is a clear desire among staff to see developments in the Work Life Balance area. Before developments take place in this area it is essential that analysis be undertaken to assess and prioritise needs and identify not only best practice but also best solutions for DCU. These priorities will require Senior Administration's support to successfully implement.

5. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns

The self-assessment report indicated that the HR Department had undertaken an in-depth analysis of their strengths and weaknesses and had identified key areas for future development. An overview of the SWOC analysis, together with additions from the PRG, is presented below.

Strengths
- Skilled, committed and hard working staff.
- Desire to change to a more strategic focus.
- Discreet and confidential service provision.
- Representation at Senior Management Level.
- Proven capacity to change effectively.

Weaknesses
- Internal Communications.
- External (within DCU) communications.
- Lack of reporting and analytical capacity.
- Lack of benchmarking against best practice elsewhere to date.
- Lack of consistency in service provision.

Opportunities
- Devolution of some functions to Faculties – enhance managers skills and knowledge
- Developments associated with the Partnership Forum especially non-HR staff participation in HR related decision making
- Implementation of Performance Management will drive development and involve all staff.
- Close involvement in preparation of new DCU Strategic Plan.
- Alignment of Training and Development with DCU Strategic Plan.

Concerns
- Employee relations affected by reduced financial support from central government.
- Demographic changes and changes to the composition of the student body will have implications for the deployment and training of staff.
- Devolution of powers to Faculty level will urgently require very substantial training resources.
- Lack of an agreed redundancy scheme between government and Unions for Public Sector bodies.
- Limited strategic vision within the HR Department.

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6. Recommendations for Improvement

The PRG recommendations are laid out according to key strategic areas already identified. Each is given a priority. The meaning of the priority indicators is as follows:
- 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 timescale.
- P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the Unit.

The recommendations are identified under two headings: those identified by the SAR and endorsed by the PRG and additional recommendations identified by the PRG.

I Recommendations Identified by SAR and endorsed by PRG

Communications:
- To continue to improve communications within HR department, exploring further what the potential problem areas may be and addressing these as quickly as possible through mechanisms such as internal team building and improved internal communication channels. (P1)

Information Systems
- There is a need to develop a knowledge management system to capture knowledge from throughout the organisation on HR issues. This could be utilised to provide a resource for staff development or the dissemination of good practices throughout the University. (P2)
- There is a need, in conjunction with the Finance Office, to move towards an integrated payroll and HR system that will address systems interface issues as well as duplication of work. (P1)
- In co-operation with Computer Services, implement the proposal to extensively use the Discoverer product for MIS purposes. (P1)
- In the interests of streamlining information provision, with a view to consistency and management of activity levels, consider acquiring help desk software for the general office. (P2)
- Develop systems and processes for devolving aspects of leave and attendance, training, contracts etc. to Units. (P2)

Performance Management
- Consider the new Performance Management system as an opportunity for the HR Department to build the skills of Heads of Schools and Units within the University in managing HR issues. (P2)

Recruitment and Selection
- Use the Web more extensively for advertising, taking in application forms electronically, making training packs available, publishing relevant parts of standard operating procedures etc. (P1)
- Implement self-identified improvements. Within the Self Assessment report the HR Department have themselves identified a number of improvements including streamlining of the pre-advertising stage, reducing the length of time the process takes, more efficient working with Heads, review of the application form, extended web based advertising, implementation of internal deadlines, training in short listing, use of new recruitment screening forms,

interview training, provision of information to candidates and publication of timelines. These should be implemented as quickly as possible. (P1)

- Direct resources freed up by the devolution of some HRM tasks and arising from a reduction in board competition activity to improving the skills of line managers in managing their own recruitment and selection processes. (P2)

Strategic Level

- Ensure consistency in the application of HR policies throughout the organisation e.g. contracts, promotion processes etc. (P1**)**
- Develop standard operating procedures. There are problems with the department's capacity to retain and transfer of knowledge in a wide variety of areas. Pensions Management is of particular concern. (P1)
- Review on an ongoing basis and in line with process initiated in the Shape Report, the efficiency and effectiveness of existing policies and procedures. This will ensure that the profile of the HR department is perceived as efficient and effective. (P1)
- In order to assess improvements in specific areas, maintain ongoing reviews through mechanisms such as staff surveys. (P2**)**
- Ensure that HR staff members remain knowledgeable and up to date on HR issues, in line with an effective department.

Training and Development

- Conduct a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis independent of Performance Management and crosscheck this assessment against the performance management findings (P1)

II   Additional Recommendations identified by PRG

Communications

- There is a need to build on the fact that the HR Office has always been responsive to the needs of its customers. It will be necessary to emphasise the fact that as the University gets bigger and becomes more proceduralised, by definition there are times when the HR Office can be less accommodating and less flexible than hitherto. It will be important to address any impression that the department is becoming less responsive to customer needs. (P2)
- There is a need to address the need to communicate effectively with Heads, clearly outlining the Department's realistic capacity for development and responsiveness to change, while progressing Heads' development in relation to HR issues. (P1)

Information and Systems

The HR Department should:

- Carry out an architectural review of the C-Docs system to ascertain whether it can be extended to provide the functionality required to meet the Unit's strategic objectives in relation to devolution, streamlining processes etc. (P1)
- Ensure that data are gathered, analysed and utilised on each element of the HR system to provide decision makers, both inside and outside the department, with useful feedback on HR processes. (P1)

The University should:

- Make a commitment to prioritise the ICT development requirements of HR and to building the required cross-school/unit processes in this context. This should involve the acquisition of a fixed term dedicated ICT resource for a

significant period of time to more speedily advance the required developments. (P1)

Performance Management:
The HR Department should:
- Be wary of over relying on the Performance Management scheme as providing the answer to current issues. Performance Management will be very resource intensive to implement in the early years and will create additional issues that will have to be tackled.(P1)

- Encourage Heads of Schools and Units to take ownership of the Performance Management process and outcomes. (P2)

The University should:
- Clearly drive Performance Management as a mechanism to improve organisational performance so that it does not become an overhead or an optional extra. (P1)
- To ensure effectiveness of the Performance Management system, include a mechanism for ensuring the accountability to Senior Management that goes beyond simply returning forms to HR. (P2)
- Consider carefully the implications for training and development in relation to the developmental focus of the scheme and how this will be managed (P1)

Recruitment Processes:
The HR Department should:
- Further establish the HR role in relation to manpower planning in the University and thereby eliminate the current ad-hoc nature of this process. (P1)
- Develop a service for career counselling for staff, particularly following the outcome of application for promotion. (P2)
- In liaison with Schools and Units ensure that there is an appropriate induction process in place. As part of this, induction should be standardised and delivered to a regular schedule. (P1.
- Explore more proactive mechanisms for 'attracting the best staff' including non-standard methods of assessment. (P2)

The HR Department and the University Should:
- Review the proposed introduction of Competency Based Interviewing. It was not clear to the panel why this was being introduced and if it was necessary.
- Review recruitment procedures to identify those which might be streamlined. This would include areas such as the composition of promotion boards. (P2)

Strategic Level:
At University level, the HR Department should:
- Leverage its strategic role through its place on the senior management team. (P1)
- The HR Department should revisit the HR strategic plan in order to identify clear themes that will engage both the department and the rest of the University in a clear sense of direction for HR activity. At present the plan is couched in quite static terms; refocusing the component elements to a more action-oriented approach would result in more engagement from its various stakeholders. (P1)

- In line with a revised, HR strategic plan, there should be a clear set of actions, critical success factors and performance metrics for each element of the plan, together with a timeline for delivery. (P1)
- It would be useful to provide an employee version of the strategic plan that identifies how employees may benefit from a strategic approach to HRM. This could take in all stages of the employee life-cycle. (P2)
- The HR department should work with others, including senior management, to map out new roles for HR in the future, especially in light of the expected devolution to managers of HR activities (P2)

The HR Department should:
- Work to integrate the currently separate activities of the department into an effective and coherent HR system.(P1)
- Clarify the areas where the HR Department adds real value to DCU processes, as identified in the Self Assessment Report, and focus on developing these further. (P2)
- Develop a system, with a set of metrics, for internal evaluation of the department and its processes. (P2)
- Review mechanisms for service provision to campus companies with a view to whether or not it would be appropriate to charge for advice and support (P1)

The HR Department and the University should:
- Consider the devolution of some recruitment and selection activities to Schools and Units, thus freeing up time for the HR officers to engage in a wider range of activities. (P2)
- Ensure that the planned training and development of Heads as part of the devolution of some HRM tasks is linked to suitable career and reward management structures for this group. Adding performance management tasks could make the role more unattractive, particularly to academics. HR officers should themselves be developed further in order to be well equipped to develop Heads of Department in recruitment and selections skills. (P1)

Training and Development:
The HR Department should:
- Create a training calendar for each semester and publish this at least one month before start of each semester. (P1)
- Define "HR training" as a separate entity from all other training. (P2)
- Ensure HR staff receive appropriate and ongoing training and development to equip them to take on new roles and responsibilities. While it is acknowledged that many staff within the HR department are undertaking qualification courses in HRM, there is a need to ensure that there is specific skill development provided in line with the direction taken by the Department. (P1)
- Undertake extensive target audience analysis before a project or training class is conducted. (P2)
- Make as much use as possible of existing DCU resources including linkages with academic departments within DCU when developing new programmes. (P1)
- Develop and establish a defined method of programme/course creation. (P1)
- Include mentoring as a key element of any staff development programme. (P1)
- Undertake regular monitoring and analysis of outcomes of training programmes, including the use of metrics, which must be established before courses begin and monitored for all courses and programmes.

Recommendations for additional or future courses can be derived from this. (P1)
- Use multiple mediums to communicate training schedule. (P3)
- Ensure that when cross campus or diagonal slice meetings/focus groups are held in relation to the Strategic Plan, the Training and Development Officer attends with a view to ensuring that training can be in place in time to facilitate change. (P2)

The University should:
- Develop and devote resources to a core training curriculum for staff to engender a culture of staff development. (P1)

Work Life Balance:
The HR Department should:
- Gather appropriate data, best practice information and research materials to outline the case to senior management for new initiatives in this area. (P1)
- Work collaboratively with the Equality office to identify top three issues that cause "imbalance" and address those. (P1)