



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Peer Review Group Report for Professional Support Areas

2024

Of

Communications, Marketing & Events

Date: 24th to 26th April 2024

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1 Introduction and Context

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

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

This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the **Communications, Marketing & Events Department** following a visit by the Peer Review Group (PRG) undertaken on Wednesday 24th April - Friday 26th April 2024

1.1 Overview of the Area under Review

The University's Communications, Marketing and Events Department (CME) uses its expertise to help DCU tell its story, positioning it as a leading innovative European University and showcasing the work it does to deliver on the mission 'to transform lives and societies', in Ireland and worldwide.

The Department provides support and advice to colleagues across DCU. It manages all aspects of the reputation of DCU, at a corporate level and through its support of faculties, schools, and academics. It is responsible for DCU's digital communications, media relations, public relations, external and internal communications, marketing, media training, event management and crisis & risk management for the University. It is also responsible for the planning, delivery, and support of a wide range of high quality, professional in person and online University events. It manages the DCU brand and its positioning, all its central advertising and marketing campaigns, web content on the University's main accounts, graphic design, videography/photography, and supports individual faculties and units in delivering effective marketing and advertising promotional campaigns and materials.

The Department's Director reports directly to the Deputy President of DCU, Professor Anne Sinnott. The Director is a member of the University's Senior Management Group in addition to other University level committees some which include, the DCU Executive committee, Heads and Deans, Rankings Committee, SIS Steering Committee and DCU Women in Leadership.

Since the last comparable quality review in 2014, the Department's structure has changed and grown. This includes the creation of the Digital Communications team and the alignment of the University Events team into the Department. With this, it now comprises a number of strategically focussed teams including Digital Communications, PR/Communications, Marketing and University Events.

The overall staff complement is 23, inclusive of the Department Director and Head of Digital Communications. A breakdown of this complement by team can be found below.

PR & Communications: 6 staff

Digital Communications: 6 staff

Marketing: 1 staff

Graphic Design: 4 Staff (2 x 1.0 FTE and 2 x 0.5FTE)

University Events: 4 staff

It is noted that the majority of the Department's staff are based in Albert College Extension on the University's Glasnevin Campus in an open-plan office space. The team also occasionally work from a satellite office located in St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra; additionally, several members of the PR & Communications team hotdesk in Faculties or Research offices. The Director and the Head of Digital Communications have their own offices in Albert College Extension.

2 Approach to Self-Assessment

2.1 Quality Review Committee

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

- Niamh O'Doherty, Communications Officer (Committee Chair)
- Céline Crawford, Director of Communications, Marketing and Events
- Bernadette Feeney, Department Assistant
- Jane Last, Head of Digital Communications
- Claire Kennelly, University Events Manager
- Thomas Kelly, Communications Manager
- Tom Swift, University Content Editor
- Natalie Neville, University Events Officer
- Stephen Smith, Graphic Designer
- Stuart Heenan, Web Specialist

The committee initially met in June 2023 with a following meeting with DCU's Quality and Institutional Insights Office taking place in September 2023 with a focus on timelines, processes and general advice. A total of 17 committee meetings took place between September 2023 and early 2024 which were conducted in person with a facility for members to call in via zoom when required. Committee meetings were minuted and updates then provided to the wider Department staff as a standing item at CME's monthly departmental meetings, which started in October 2023.

2.2 The Self-Assessment Report

The PRG recognises the comprehensive approach taken by CME, that good methods were applied to collect data and feedback where it was agreed by the committee. Subsequently a staff away day was arranged to capture internal feedback and build a team-led SWOC analysis, facilitated by Scott Burnett of Wove.co; concurrently, a short survey was sent to an agreed list of internal and external stakeholders. Finally, an anonymous survey was sent to all CME staff to capture their feedback after the away-

day session. The PRG recognises the engagement levels and authenticity of the future focused approach taken to the Self Assessment Report (SAR).

Each step of the process was shared with and signed off by the Quality Review committee. Specific roles were handed down to Stephen Smith (Graphic Design) and Tom Swift (Content Editor) with regards to the design and writing of the final Self-Assessment Report. Logistics and operational management planning for both the team away-day and the committee meetings was carried out by Department Assistant Bernadette Feeney. This report was drafted by Tom Swift with notes taken at committee meetings, and given to the committee members for feedback prior to publication.

The PRG found the SAR to be predominantly reflective of the findings throughout the face to face meeting. It also found the SWOC to be largely effective. However it was noted that the SAR was light on strengths, successes and reputation of the CME in the University which came strongly to light in meetings with stakeholders. It is acknowledged that CME took a self-reflective and future focused approach to the SAR which may have influenced this.

3 Approach Taken By Peer Review Group

3.1 Peer Review Group Members

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

- Mr. Peter McConkey, Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications, Queens University Belfast (Chair)
- Ms. Hannah Baldwin, Head of Corporate Communications at Loughborough University
- Mr. Conor O'Donovan, Head of Global Communications, Enterprise Ireland
- Prof. Joseph Stokes, School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, Dublin City University
- Ms. Deirdre Reynolds, Human Resources, ER and HR Service Delivery Manager, Dublin City University
- Ms. Melissa Lynch, School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education, Dublin City University

3.2 Overview of Approach Taken by Peer Review Group

In advance of the Peer-Review Visit, the PRG engaged with the documentation provided by the Quality Promotion Office (QPO) and provided initial impressions before the review visit in order to identify possible themes to explore during the visit. The documentation provided in advance included the SAR, documentation relating to the Quality Review Process in DCU and a draft timetable for the visit. Additional documents were requested during the visit, for example, details on the SAR methodology such as the range of questions asked in the stakeholder survey and information on the away day. These were provided by the QPO. Mr Peter McConkey, agreed to chair the PRG. Ms Deirdre Reynolds took on the role of Coordinating Reviewer. The Chair agreed to give the exit presentation to the Communications, Marketing and Events staff at the end of the Peer-Review Visit.

The PRG utilised their private meeting times and discussed the various themes emerging from the SAR and their initial impressions. The group discussed the different headings of the template document under “Findings of the Peer Review Group” and agreed to focus on areas using their experience and areas of interest.

As detailed in the timetable provided in Appendix 1, meetings were held with members of staff in the CME, stakeholders and Senior Management during the Peer-Review Visit. These included meetings with the Director of CME, members of the Quality Review Committee, academic, professional and student stakeholders. A tour of CME facilities was led by Niamh O’Doherty. 6 Members of the PRG prepared in advance of each meeting and a member of the PRG was assigned to lead the discussion at each meeting. Other members of the PRG also participated as appropriate.

From the outset, the PRG wished to encourage a collegial and open approach. The PRG welcomed the fact that in the majority of meetings the breadth of expertise within units and the sense of collegiality were apparent, leading to open dialogue.. The PRG were appreciative of the largely open and candid discussions with CME and stakeholders.

The PRG group gathered the data from these meetings, and then collated this data into emerging findings and themes. Throughout the process notes were kept ensuring that findings and recommendations were linked to the data emerging from the process.

4 Approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement

4.1 Progress Since Last Review

This is the first Quality Review of CME in its current structure. The Department’s staffing structure has changed since the last comparable Quality Review period (2014). Since this, strategic changes and restructuring have taken place, including the creation of a Digital Communications team and the University Events team joining CME, having previously been under the aegis of the President’s Office. The current Department Director was initially appointed into the University in August 2019. Whilst it is noted that the communications and marketing functions of the University were briefly reviewed in 2017 it was as part of a much larger External Affairs Department review.

There are a range of quality assurance and enhancement processes documented in the SAR and further reflected during the review. Particular attention was drawn in the SAR to a number of recommendations.

Redesign of dcu.ie

The DCU website was first redesigned after the 2014 review, and included several updates based on the feedback and was subsequently reviewed in 2019, following the appointment of a new Director and Head of Digital Communications. The SAR notes this redesign was found to be lacking in the area of digital accessibility and, in order for them website to comply with the National Disability Authority’s guidelines for digital accessibility, based on the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020, the digital-first rebranding project mentioned above was implemented in 2022.

DCU Brand Refresh

The brand refresh was completed in 2022. This was conducted working with an external agency in order to deliver a digital first evolution of the DCU branding. The revised brand allowed for better signposting of the user journey on the DCU website, while improved web accessibility was another key driver - all colours and contrasts were tested to ensure compliance with digital accessibility legislation. New colourways, fonts, photography, illustration, motion and patterns were developed to create a unique aesthetic for faculties, schools and units across the University. Whilst this was completed in 2022, the roll-out of new assets continue.

New cross-departmental and individual team meetings schedule

To assist with future planning, each team within CME meets weekly, alongside a weekly Managers Group meeting for an overview of current and upcoming projects. Once per month, the entire Department meets for updates on the current activities and achievements of each team and to flag upcoming projects, with time kept for brainstorming and training as required.

New Posts created

In addressing a number of areas highlighted in the past review, a number of new posts were created in CME. These include, but are not limited to:

- Head of Digital Communications
- Web Specialist
- Research Communications Officer
- Marketing Officer
- Social Media and Online Engagement Editor

Improvements to internal communications

Several small-scale improvements have been implemented - including the development of a weekly staff update message and the creation of a new network of digital messaging screens across campus. These measures have dramatically enhanced internal communications in DCU.

Improvements to marketing strategy

Since the last review, CME has entered into partnerships with key marketing suppliers like Mindshare and Invention, and created the role of Marketing Officer to further define and achieve marketing aims and objectives. However local marketing officers in each faculty do not report into CME and there is not enough strategic alignment or digital marketing expertise to achieve, in particular, international student recruitment aims.

5 Findings of the Peer Review Group

5.1 Planning and Effective Management of Resources

The SAR recognises the challenging environment that higher education in Ireland is operating in and emphasises the CME team's commitment to ensure that its staffing and budgetary resources are always deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

5.1.1 Strategic planning

The PRG found the CME team's planning processes to be well-coordinated and agile, commending the alignment of the CME strategy and the operational plans for each of the Department's component areas to the University's overarching strategy. The five CME objectives provide a clear roadmap that will guide the delivery and ongoing

enhancement of the CME function and provide a framework that enables the team to prioritise their workload to meet the University's strategic objectives. By undertaking an annual review of their strategy, the CME team can be nimble, refocusing activity in response to shifts in corporate strategic priorities and any changes in the external environment.

The PRG recommends that the CME communicates its objectives to Faculties and Units within the University to enhance institution-wide understanding of the team's workload prioritisation and its drivers for the deployment of resources. This will support two-way strategic alignment; mutual understanding of the business needs; better understanding of remits, roles and responsibilities; and more coordinated ways of working.

The PRG recommends that the CME strategic objective alignment table and progress against Key Performance Indicators are shared after the University's Year 1 review process. This will enable CME to raise awareness and understanding among the wider University community of the team's role and value in supporting delivery of the corporate strategic objectives. There was widespread feedback throughout the review process that the CME team were too modest about their work and performance and should be more emphatic in recognising and communicating their contribution to the successful delivery of the University strategy.

5.1.2 Structure and organisation

The SAR notes that the CME team, in its current structure, is relatively new, and its progress and achievements were widely commended through the PRG process. The integration of new areas into CME, such as the establishment of a Digital Communications Team and the incorporation of the Events Team, were recognised as positive developments.

The SAR notes that two Communications staff within CME currently operate on a 'hybrid model', spending time and working closely on a day-to-day basis with both CME and the Faculty/Unit. It notes that pooling resources in this way provides a more cohesive, flexible and strategic communications function for the University.

The PRG commends the effectiveness of this collaborative approach where it is operating and supports the exploration of an initial hybrid approach for the marketing function across additional areas to deliver support for the Faculties/Units.

This would also support the development of a 'business partner' approach. The PRG found there to be a largely positive appetite for such an approach and would recommend its exploration to streamline the interaction between Faculties/Units and the CME team, triage workload demands and support prioritisation against strategic priorities.

5.1.3 Staffing resources

The PRG noted the limited resource currently dedicated to marketing, with just one member of staff based wholly within CME. There is an appreciation that there is an increasingly competitive landscape within Higher Education and therefore an essential need to ensure the DCU story and offering is front and centre. As outlined in the SAR and reflected through the review there is a need for a more centralised and in-house marketing model to allow for a more agile response and most effective use of resources.

In consideration of the above the PRG recommends that the remit of the currently vacant marketing manager role is reimagined to provide leadership on the marketing strategy, ensure maximisation of the emerging opportunities, particularly around international student recruitment, and coordinate a hub and spoke model across Faculties/Units.

The PRG also recommends the exploration of the opportunity for a coordination/supervisory responsibility for the creative team to support project management prioritisation and workflow management.

The SAR recognises the recruitment and retention challenges within the current staffing market and the need to adopt a creative approach to address these. The SAR subsequently suggested the exploration of an internship scheme, the benefits of which would be twofold: enabling CME to benefit from institutionally-knowledgeable students who have evolving skills within marketing, communications and events, and supporting work-placed skills development and employability for the University's own students.

The PRG welcomes CME's commitment to Continuing Professional Development and its adoption of the DCU Performance Review and Development process to support the development of a talent pipeline and career development opportunities within the team.

5.1.4 Working environment and space

The PRG recognises that the co-location of the CME team into a shared, open-plan office space has enabled the staff to work more collaboratively and in a more coordinated manner, enabling better, more spontaneous, communication and meaning the team can be more agile in response to the fast-paced nature of the team's work.

The current space is now at capacity, however. This means it will not comfortably allow for the further expansion of a hybrid approach to the delivery of marketing support for the Faculties and Units. The success of this model relies on staff spending part of their time in the CME office, to work collaboratively with CME colleagues and benefit from shared professional knowledge, skills and experience. The lack of break-out and quiet/creative working space within the current office set-up is also problematic, particularly for those staff whose roles sometimes require distraction-free environments.

Recognising these constraints, and the University's space management policy, the PRG recommends further exploration of the options for additional space, as identified in the SAR, to accommodate Faculty/Unit 'hybrid' staff and to provide a dynamic space for creative development, brainstorming and strategic service enhancements.

5.2 Effectiveness of Activities and Processes

The PRG recognises the management and organisation of the CME as effective, with the high quality of individuals working across the department. Commendation is given to the CME for its impressive team and departmental meeting structure, characterised by regularity and consistency, facilitating improved collaboration and communication and skills-sharing among its constituent teams. As noted in the SAR, the expansion of the CME department has significantly enhanced its efficiency and effectiveness.

Additionally, the COVID-19 experience has contributed to enabling the CME to build greater agility and innovation into their processes, while also accelerating the adoption of a digital-first approach to Marketing and Communications. All CME staff members demonstrate positive engagement with their work and possess a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The entire department exhibits a high level of dedication to both their specific areas of work and the overall needs of the unit.

5.2.1 Reviewing and improving processes

Outlined within the SAR and analysis from the PRG, it is evident that the CME department employs a diverse range of methods, both structured and informal, to evaluate and enhance operational quality. Constructive engagement with stakeholders ensures alignment with their needs and expectations, while participation in professional bodies such as the Public Relations Institute of Ireland keeps the department informed of best practices and industry trends. Several review processes, including yearly surveys of internal and external stakeholders, post-activity feedback forms, and daily reports from Ruepoint, CME's media monitor, contribute to performance evaluation.

However, the analysis highlights an ongoing challenge regarding uncertainty about how and whom to contact within CME for assistance or access to CME services. The PRG sees value in CME implementing a triage system as called out in their SAR, to streamline staff requests towards appropriate teams. While quantifying the department's contribution may be challenging, indicators such as University ranking tables and trends in students' CAO preferences reflect its impact on student recruitment and brand promotion. The departmental meetings and away days provide valuable opportunities for reflection and improvement.

5.2.2 Risk Management

CME exhibits a robust approach to risk management, playing a central role in safeguarding the University's reputation. During the PRG visit, the Communications team clearly expressed how they demonstrated foresight by proactively planning for future crises and implementing security measures and preventions accordingly this was also validated by members of the Senior Management Group. Leveraging data from media monitoring provider Ruepoint and supported by services like RiskEye, the team diligently assesses commentary and potential risks within its purview. Close coordination between the Digital Communications team and all members of CME ensures timely identification and flagging of content presenting risks, while collaborative efforts with the University President and Senior Management enable swift response and crafting of messaging in adverse scenarios. Proactive measures extend to managing high-stakes events in partnership with DCU Security and DCU Estates, ensuring comprehensive preparedness across the Department. Comprehensive communication plans, including those tailored for emergencies like cyber attacks, underscore CME's commitment to risk mitigation. Director Céline Crawford's active involvement in DCU's Senior Management Group activities further

reinforces the Department's readiness, demonstrating a keen sense of risk awareness and a proactive stance towards safeguarding the University's interests.

The PRG commends the CME for their effective risk management practices, including positive reputation and risk management, while acknowledging the impressive team structures and dedication displayed throughout. Implementing the recommendations of the PRG will further enhance the CME's effectiveness in activities and processes, ensuring continued success and efficiency.

5.2.3 Collaborative Processes and Activities

The PRG commends the CME for its utilisation of collaborative processes and activities, which significantly enhance the Department's effectiveness. The robust support and collaboration from various University faculties, units, and individual colleagues are pivotal to the success of the CME's endeavours. Notably, the contributions of students play a vital role in enriching the Department's operations.

From the PRG analysis it is evident that Academic and Research staff provide invaluable content empowering the CME to tell the story of DCU. Commendation is due for the seamless collaboration with key units such as the President's Office, HR, the Office of the Chief Operating Officer, and the Office of the VP for Academic Affairs, which ensures access to essential information and support.

The University Events team's close collaboration with departments such as Estates and external entities like the Helix and Trispace is commendable, facilitating the seamless execution of events. Particular emphasis and commendation are warranted for the coordination with the Registry and the President's Office during biannual graduation ceremonies and VIP visits, respectively

To further enhance cohesive collaboration, the PRG fully supports the planned "root and branch review" currently planned, which should be expanded to inform the specific responsibilities of the CME within the Digital Strategy. It is also recommended that a Digital Board be created, chaired by a member of SMG with professional service and academic membership, to oversee the implementation of the digital strategy with potential for future ownership of digital governance.

It is recommended by the PRG that there be an opportunity to implement and maintain a University wide campaign calendar that is accessible.

The PRG recommends taking a strategic lead in amplifying the authentic student voice and brand to prospective students through direct formal engagement with existing student recruitment efforts.

5.3 Communication and Provision of Information

It was clear from the SAR and the PRG visit that the CME Department at DCU maintains a robust communication framework centred on in-person interaction, crucial for its functioning. Regular meetings, collaborative platforms, mailouts, and digital channels ensure both internal and external stakeholders are well-informed and have

opportunities to contribute to decisions and actions. Team and department meetings ensure everyone understands project requirements, while broader briefings and debriefs facilitate structured feedback and idea sharing. Strategic reflection occurs during Away Days. Close coordination with external departments and thorough volunteer briefings before high-profile events ensure smooth operations. The open-plan office fosters spontaneous discussions, facilitating quick information exchange and problem-solving. The Department Assistant, plays a key role in formal and informal information dissemination among staff members.

The PRG recommends that during debrief meetings, there is a Voice of the Client approach to garnering insights, as well as data and insights on student activity on the website and social media to keep a continuous feedback loop and ensure communications tactics, messages and channel selection evolve as a result.

5.3.1 Working platforms and equipment

The team utilises multiple collaborative platforms like Teamwork (internally), Google Calendar and Google Drive (University wide) for instant project input and to maintain an overview of timelines, requirements, and updates, The open-plan office setup sometimes poses challenges, the basis for recommendation given.

Innovation within the team and the adoption of digital tools such as Teamwork was recognised as very useful to enhance collaboration and efficiency on projects on which different parts of the team were involved.

5.3.2 Sharing information with the wider DCU community

As the University's Communication Department, the CME prioritises disseminating information campus-wide through various channels including the DCU website, digital screens across campus, weekly staff update emails, and social media updates etc. using a digital-first approach all the way to University's Senior Management Group via the Directors membership, something many stakeholders commended CME on.

During the PRG review it was recognised by the President and many Stakeholders, that the introduction of new communications initiatives, particularly during Covid-19 such as the weekly Newsletter, was very positive and continues to be issued due to its popularity.

The diversification of social media, enhanced by the establishment of the Digital Communications team was highly commended also, recognising the importance of communicating with different audiences in the most appropriate channels.

From the PRG review it is clear there is an opportunity for CME, due to its respect and regard in the wider University, to continue to position itself as a strategic partner to the University and further increase its influence on key reputational issues. The PRG would recommend that the CME further leverage this opportunity.

Linking to the recommendation under Section 5.1 it is again important to note here the need for clear strategic alignment with particular regard to clarity on roles and responsibilities around communications and information, aligned to the University's strategy.

During the review several communication gaps were highlighted both by CME and stakeholders, hence the recommendations provided around internal feedback loops through yearly staff surveys, matching these against their strategic objectives and CME remit, along with seeking input from colleagues during media training workshops and events. Secondly, recognizing the value of visual communication, especially for design-related work, the team aims to provide more space for ideation and collaboration within the office environment to foster ongoing development and feedback sharing among team members.

The PRG recommends the CME to explore a solution to enhance governance of internal communications and manage the reputation risk including a review of the approach for staff communications. It was also noted that a platform such as WorkVivo may assist in managing internal communications.

5.4 Ongoing Quality Enhancement

The CME team through the SAR, and the in-person meetings, evidenced to the PRG that at a departmental, team and individual level there is a strong commitment to ensuring a process of continuous improvement in the quality of CME outputs and processes. A very strong sense of taking pride in the work came across from all team members.

The CME team recognise that restructuring of the department provides opportunities for improvement of practices, and that performance of the new structures will need to be monitored to ensure they are delivering the expected improvements in quality.

The PRG has commended the CME team for their clear alignment with University goals (see section 5.1) and noted that CME's overall quality goals are derived from and aligned with the University strategy's five pillars in a similar way. It was also noted that yearly improvement targets are developed on a rolling basis over the five-year lifespan of the strategies. Sub-plans for each team within CME lay out improvement objectives in more detail. Ultimately, these objectives serve the DCU Strategy and its mission 'to transform lives and societies'.

As outlined in Section 2 of this report the PRG commended the CME SAR staff leads and the whole CME team for their engagement with the process which was positive, authentic and future focused. Open and honest communication within the Department is evidently a key driver of quality enhancement. Regular team meetings, along with informal conversations, have helped to identify areas for improvement and CME provided evidence of a well structured approach to open communication practices which the panel felt supported the supportive culture in the team including:

- Project debrief Meetings
- Weekly senior managers and section meetings
- Monthly departmental meetings which provide a forum for staff to propose and discuss improvements to working practices while also celebrating successful initiatives.

It was clear to the PRG that within the CME teams there is regular dialogue and constructive feedback from peers regarding the output across the whole department.

5.4.1 Benchmarking

Again the PRG recognised that in Ireland's increasingly competitive higher education market the CME needs to meet the highest national and international standards. The PRG noted that the Department has a number of effective solutions in place to monitor and benchmark its performance and outputs against competitor institutions. Team members engage with peers at Irish University Association monthly meetings and other sectoral events, which allows for relevant information sharing. The PRG supports the current programme attendance at relevant Higher Education conferences and Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) both in Ireland and internationally to keep across best practice in the sector.

5.4.2 Metrics

The PRG noted that despite the limited resources and relatively small size of the digital team, good processes are in place using data analytics tools to assess the effectiveness of campaigns, and to monitor internal and external engagement with web, email and social media content. Effective media monitoring through Ruepoint gives the Communications team a detailed picture of DCU's presence and impact.

A number of stakeholders noted to the PRG the importance and effectiveness of the online monitoring provider RiskEye which measures consumer sentiment towards DCU across social media platforms. The PRG support the CME plan to update the 2021 reputation audit, which focused on DCU's marketing and branding output, and established baseline behaviours and sentiments. The PRG noted the risks associated with the limited resource for SEO, and as noted in section 5.2.3 are supportive of the "Digital root and branch" review.

The PRG recognised the positive impact arising from the integration of the University Events team, which was recognised by peers as delivering over and beyond its previous remit, and support attendance monitoring benchmarking, and the potential for further digital solutions for capturing attendees data more efficiently. Participant surveys should be adopted where possible and the PRG noted that the CME have implemented post evaluation follow up after Media Training and other sessions delivered to colleagues, with a view to monitoring quality and effectiveness.

5.4.3 Awards and Recognition

The PRG recognised the benefit of promoting and recognising good practice and positive behaviours, and noted the contribution of CME Department members has been recognised in the Annual DCU President's Awards for Professional Staff. s.

While external award submissions are time consuming the PRG do recognise the value in maintaining a steady output and would encourage CME to continue the process with industry and sector award bodies including Times Higher Education, and noted recent recognition including the DCU Brand Refresh which featured in the 100 Archive.

5.4.4 Funding and Resources

The PRG noted that the Digital Communications team has been awarded funding for a joint proposal with DCU Information System Service (ISS) to develop a Chatbot facility on the dcu.ie website. The PRG supports the idea raised by CME that a Quality Enhancement working group would be set up in CME to identify areas for quality

improvements and to scope funding and other opportunities that would allow the team to action their ideas.

The PRG recognises the challenging environment in which the team are operating, and the competing priorities for internal resources. As noted in Section 5.1 the PRG commended the collaborative approach by the CME team in faculty with the successful operation of the 'business partner' style hybrid model. This was highlighted as a success by many stakeholders during the PRG review, and there is a clear appetite from CME internal customers to find an effective solution to enable more access to the skillset in the current CME team. The PRG recognise that to meet increased demand locally and in international markets requires a review of current provision, and an agreed and shared set of business objectives aligned to university strategy.

In order to meet the future demands and continue to deliver the required quality standards the PRG recommends that CME lead, with faculty support, a skills and capability review to ensure business needs are met and that staff have the prerequisite skills to deliver on shared objectives. This review should include scoping the possibility of a future centralised (business partner) model, supporting mutual understanding of business/unit needs and alignment with CME support.

5.5 External Perspectives

The CME Department within their SAR emphasised the importance of gathering stakeholder feedback to inform strategic decisions, with plans to conduct annual surveys for ongoing improvement. Efforts to capture external (external to CME) perspectives were designed to be replicable and efficient, resulting in a baseline ranking for future performance measurement. The department plans to expand surveys to include campus-wide engagement with internal communication platforms. Feedback from stakeholders highlighted the department's effectiveness (7.9/10), professionalism, and approachability, as well as their growing creative and visual skills. Overall experience working with CME was rated at 8.6/10, based on an 80% response rate, which provides valuable insights for future planning and development.

During the PRG visit, it was clear that the Department bases itself on strong communication approaches, evident both in the approach taken to draft the SAR and during the visit itself, hence the Commendation around the SAR engagement, its positivity, authenticity and future focus approach. It was evident that the CME staff were held in high regard across the University and had an incredibly positive reputation amongst academic and professional support staff as well as students, and CME staff willingness to help no matter what the problem was; hence the Commendation around the recognition of their high-quality output and the professionalism of the CME Team. Senior Management also praised this unit for its contribution to both the DCU's strategic plan and particular supports it provides, as per the Commendations of the endorsement of CME strategic objectives complementing the University Strategy along with the enhancement of the CME function, together with their positive management of reputation and risk.

5.5.1 Interactions with Staff (Academic, Professional Services etc.) and Students

During the PRG visit, external stakeholders involved Staff (Academic, Professional Services etc.) and Students, therefore no interactions between external parties outside of DCU were in scope during the review. It was clear that DCU Staff and Students were clear about CME remit (cited as "*Storytellers of How DCU Transforms Lives and*

Societies”) when presented, but along with annual surveys and feedback, the PRG see the need for further communication of its remit and the support/expertise and skill sets the CME team offer. This should be approached by reviewing the communication approach taken to date, including roadshows etc. with an aim to re-market CME remit and support. This should also form part of the initial hybrid approach for Faculties (aid addressing aspects of Recommendation around carrying out a skills and capability review in conjunction with Faculty to ensure the alignment for business needs), but also extend to all relevant units where required. This approach should be taken to address the Recommendation around establishing a two-way strategic alignment and mutual understanding of the business needs, through the formation of an alignment table of the Units strategic objectives and associated KPI’s (starting with Year 1). Such shared and prioritisation of objectives should be utilised to clearly define roles and responsibilities and ‘ways of working’ together (between DCU stakeholders and CME). The publication and communication of such, should aid CME in ‘marketing’ itself and demonstrating where it utilises strategic guiding principles of ‘focus’ and ‘impact’ and delivers value to the University at a high level and would also form the basis of Recommendation around developing an a campaign calendar which can be widely accessible by stakeholders.

Overall, the PRG commends CME on maintaining its external perspective to date and feels the above recommendations will only enhance CME remit and support across the University.

6 SWOC Analysis and Plans for Improvement

6.1 SWOC Analysis for Communications, Marketing and Events

The SAR included a proposed summary SWOT analysis of CME. As a result of the Peer Review Group’s analysis of the SAR and findings from the peer review visit, we propose the following to be a true reflection of the Areas capabilities and opportunities, and identified weakness and threats to future success.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diverse range of industry appropriate skills and experience ● Entrepreneurial problem solving attitudes ● Future focused and ambitious ● Integrity and values driven ● Attention to detail and pride in the work ● Strong leadership and influence at SMG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of uniform campus wide understanding of unit responsibilities and expertise, and its alignment to university goals ● Reliance on manual support systems and internal relationships to manage workflows ● Under resourced Digital marketing team ● Lack of central departmental voice/representation in faculty marketing teams

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish/confirm CME as the creative 'go to' agency hub for the University, setting out clear role and responsibilities ● Develop creative studio space to promote and nurture creative output ● Showcase CME talent with internal colleagues through collaborative projects ● Create a team structure that meets university's changing needs in digital marketing for local and international audiences ● Establish clear leadership role for CME in university digital strategy ● Embed workflow software platform across all CME teams ● Develop and promote 'authentic' content and storytelling for teaching, research and student experience ● Opportunity for university wide internal communication platform to connect and engage with employees in a consistent manner ● Build professional networks and share best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CME marketing function in state of flux ● Breaking down traditional university silo approach to sales and marketing ● Building trust and capability quickly to reduce reliance on external agencies ● Willingness across the University to take risk with traditional marketing approaches to UG recruitment ● Ability to manage 'client' expectations in face of multiple competing priorities

6.2 Plans for Improvement Identified by Communications, Marketing and Events

The PRG would first acknowledge the commitment to providing a professional service to the University. It is clear to the PRG that CME as a whole and on an individual basis are seen to have impact, are trusted and are highly regarded at all levels in the University. As a result of the review process the PRG generally agrees with the emerging themes and identified Areas of Improvement stated in the SAR.

The PRG acknowledges that the areas identified by the CME are reflected in the recommendations which the PRG have made above, albeit with some variances. The PRG would also like to note that the awareness of the CME's areas for improvement and opportunity can be reasonably attributed to their use of the stakeholder surveys and the self reflective approach to the SAR.

By identifying skills gap in the Department, synthesising the team-lead SWOC analysis and scrutinising the results of the stakeholder surveys, CME pitched three main questions in line with the three areas of strategic priority for the CME. These were:

- "How do we enhance the marketing function?"
The PRG endorses the need to enhance the marketing function. The PRG would place particular emphasis on the delivery of marketing supports to Faculty and units, the remit of the Marketing Manager role to lead the marketing strategy and workflow prioritisation for the creative team.

- “How do we resource and structure our digital activities to deliver better outcomes for DCU?”
The PRG acknowledges that significant investments on digital activities require significant resources to build out a team. However the PRG also notes that resources are a challenge not just to CME but University wide. In consideration of this the PRG fully supports the planned “Digital root and branch” review currently planned which should be expanded to inform the specific responsibilities of CME within CME Digital Strategy in the first instance. It is noted that it is hoped this review will be conducted in Summer 2024 and presented to DCU Senior Management Group before the end of 2024.
- “How do we reimagine internal communications within DCU?”
The PRG acknowledged the requirement to review internal communications within DCU. It is recommended that CME explore a solution to enhance governance of internal communications and manage the reputation risk including the review of the approach for staff communications.

7 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

No	Commendation	P	Level	
<i>Planning and Effective Management of Resources</i>				
1	<i>Commendation</i>			The CME strategic objectives complement the University Strategy. The PRG noted the five key objectives have a clear roadmap for delivery and enhancement of the CME function. These were evident throughout the SAR and the review.
2	<i>Commendation</i>			The integration of the Events team and the development of the Digital Communications team into CME was recognised as a positive development, from stakeholders, SMG and the PRG.
3	<i>Commendation</i>			The PRG commended the “hybrid model approach” introduced by the CME to working across Faculty for a limited number of communication roles.
<i>Effectiveness of Activities and Processes</i>				
4	<i>Commendation</i>			The review found that CME is recognised for the effective stewarding of University reputation through a proactive approach. Therefore the PRG found a clear positive management of reputation and risk by the CME.
<i>Communication and Provision of Information</i>				
5	<i>Commendation</i>			The review found that the new communications initiatives and processes implemented by the CME have garnered positive feedback. These

				include the weekly newsletter, the diversification of social media messaging and introduction of “teamworks” within the CME team.
Ongoing Quality Enhancement				
6	Commendation			The PRG commended the SAR engagement process by CME and the review found that it was approached in a positive, authentic and growth mindset.
Stakeholder Relationships				
7	Commendation			Throughout the review the PRG found there was a recognition from stakeholders across the board of the high-quality output from and professionalism of the CME team. In particular reference to COVID and the Graduations.

No	Recommendation	P	Level	
Planning and Effective Management of Resources				
1	Recommendation	P1	A	Ensure two-way strategic alignment and mutual understanding of the business needs. Alignment table and KPI's to be shared as benchmark post Year 1 review aligned to plan on a page.
2	Recommendation	P1	A	Reimagine the remit of the Marketing Manager role to lead on the marketing strategy with regards to emerging opportunity of international student recruitment and coordination of a hub and spoke model across Faculty/Units.
3	Recommendation	P2	A/U	In recognition of the University space management policy and constraints, develop additional dedicated creative space as already identified by the area.
4	Recommendation	P1	A	Explore the opportunity for a coordination/supervisory responsibility for the Creative team to address project management prioritisations and workflow.
5	Recommendation	P2	A/U	Support the exploration of an initial hybrid approach to the delivery marketing support for Faculty/Unit. Similar to the current Communications officers operating in research and FSH
Effectiveness of Activities and Processes				
6	Recommendation	P2	A	Take the strategic lead to amplify the authentic student voice and brand to prospective students through direct formal engagement with already existing Student Recruitment.

7	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>A</i>	Explore the implementation of a University wide events calendar that is accessible.
8	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>A/U</i>	Fully support the planned “Digital root and branch” review currently planned which should be expanded to inform the specific responsibilities of CME within wider University Digital Strategy.
9	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>A/U</i>	Creation of Digital Board chaired by a member of SMG with professional service and academic membership to oversee implementation of digital strategy with potential for future ownership of digital governance.
<i>Communication and Provision of Information</i>				
10	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>A</i>	Explore and develop a solution to enhance governance of internal communications and manage the reputation risk including a review of the approach for staff communications.
<i>Ongoing Quality Enhancement</i>				
11	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>A/U</i>	Carry out a skills and capability review in conjunction with all Faculties to ensure the alignment for business needs.

Appendices

DCU Communications, Marketing and Events Quality Review Timetable 24th to 26th April 2024

Day 1:- Wednesday 24th April 2024		
Time	Meeting	Attendees
9.45am-10am	Arrival of Peer Review Group members	· Peer Review Group
10am-11am	Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion	· Rachel Keegan, <i>Director of Quality and Institutional Research</i>
11am-1pm	PRG private meeting	· Peer Review Group

1pm-2pm	Quality Review Committee Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rachel Keegan, <i>Director of Quality and Institutional Research</i> · Céline Crawford, <i>Director of Communications, Marketing and Events</i> · Bernadette Feeney, <i>CME Department Assistant</i> · Jane Last, <i>Head of Digital Communications</i> · Claire Kennelly, <i>University Events Manager</i> · Thomas Kelly, <i>Communications Manager</i> · Tom Swift, <i>University Content Editor</i> · Natalie Neville, <i>University Events Officer</i> · Stephen Smith, <i>Graphic Design</i> · Stuart Heenan, <i>Web Specialist</i> · Niamh O'Doherty, <i>Communications Officer and Committee Chair</i>
2pm-2.15pm	PRG discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group
2.15pm-3pm	Meeting with students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Joshua Dunne <i>Student Engagement, Office of Student Life - DCU SU</i> · Emma Monahan, <i>Vice President for Community & Citizenship - DCU SU</i> · Sam Mooney, <i>Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion - DCU SU</i>
3pm-4pm	Meeting with Area Management Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Céline Crawford, <i>Director of Communications and Marketing</i> · Jane Last, <i>Head of Digital Communications</i> · Claire Kennelly, <i>University Events Manager</i> · Thomas Kelly, <i>Communications Manager</i>

4pm-5pm	CME Tour of Offices/Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Communications, Marketing and Events
5pm-5.30pm	PRG discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review Group
Day 2:- Thursday 25th April 2024		
Time	Meeting	Attendees
8.45am-9am	PRG morning meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review Group
9am-9.40am	Meeting with CME Communications Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thomas Kelly, <i>Communications Manager</i> Tom Swift, <i>University Content Editor</i> Rob O'Hanrahan, <i>Communications Officer</i> Niamh O'Doherty, <i>Communications Officer</i> Conor O'Donovan, <i>Research Communications Officer</i> Seán Duke, <i>Communications Officer, Faculty of Science and Health</i> Bernadette Feeney, <i>CME Department Assistant</i>
9.45am-10.25am	Meeting with CME Digital Communications Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jane Last, <i>Head of Digital Communications</i> Stuart Heenan, <i>Web Specialist</i> Kyran O'Brien, <i>Videographer/Photographer</i> Daire Hall, <i>Videographer</i> Gerard Shiels, <i>Social Media and Online Engagement Editor</i> Jennifer Magee, <i>Student Recruitment Social Media Editor</i>
10.30am-11am	PRG meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review Group

11am-11.40am	Meeting with CME Creative Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ciaran Coyle, <i>Graphic Designer</i> · April Keane, <i>Graphic Designer</i> · Marie Leahy, <i>Graphic Designer</i> · Stephen Smith, <i>Graphic Designer</i>
11.40am-12.20pm	Meeting with CME Marketing and Faculty/Student Recruitment Marketing points of contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Shreya Mehta, <i>Marketing Officer, CME</i> · Colette O'Beirne, <i>Senior Student Recruitment Officer</i> · Martin Kelly, <i>Student Recruitment Officer</i> · Áine Nolan, <i>Senior Administrative Officer (Marketing), Faculty of Engineering and Computing</i> · Sinéad Ní Chrualaoi, <i>Administrative Officer, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences</i> · Ciara Feeney, <i>Administration - Marketing, DCU Business School</i>
12.20pm-1pm	Meeting with key academic staff from other university schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Gëzim Visoka, <i>Associate Dean for Research for Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences;</i> · Tanya Lokot, <i>School of Communications</i> · Theo Lynn, <i>Business School</i> · Eadaoin Carthy, <i>School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering</i> · Sinead McNally, <i>DCU Institute of Education</i> · Martin Molony, <i>School of Communications</i> · Diarmuid Torney, <i>School of Law and Government</i> · Eric Clinton, <i>Business School</i> · Dawn Wheatley, <i>School of Communications</i>
1pm-2pm	PRG Private Meeting Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group

2pm-2.40pm	Meeting with senior representatives from relevant Central Support Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Justin Doyle, <i>Director of ISS</i> · Niamh McMahon, <i>Student Awards Manager Registry</i> · Robbie Roulston, <i>Deputy COO & FOI Officer</i> · Jennifer Richardson, <i>DCU Management & Financial Planning</i> · Fiona Maguire, <i>Finance Business Partner</i> · Jennifer O'Hara, <i>Head of Learning & Organisational Development</i> · Lorraine Heffernan, <i>Office Manager, DCU President's Office</i> · Gerard McEvoy, <i>Head of Estates</i> · John McDonough, <i>University Librarian</i> · Marcella Bannon, <i>Cultural Arts Officer</i> · James Galvin, <i>Director of Sports and Wellbeing</i> · Claire Bohan, <i>Dean of Students, SSD</i> · Una Redmond, <i>Director, Office of Student Life</i> · Fiona Brennan, <i>Research Support Manager, RIS</i>
2.40pm-3.20pm	Meeting with CME University Events team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Claire Kennelly, <i>University Events Manager</i> · Natalie Neville, <i>University Events Officer</i> · Kyle Ryan, <i>University Events Coordinator</i>
3.20pm-4pm	PRG Private Meeting Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group
4pm-4.30pm	Staff Open Forum for any member of CME staff.	-
4.30pm-5.30pm	Meeting with Area Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Céline Crawford, <i>Director of Communications and Marketing</i>
7pm-9pm	PRG private meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group

Day 3:- Friday 26th April 2024

Time	Meeting	Attendees
8.45am-9am	PRG Private Meeting Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group
9am-9.55am	PRG Meeting with DCU Senior Management Group (SMG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Prof. Daire Keogh, DCU President · Prof. Anne Sinnott, DCU Deputy President · Prof. Lisa Looney, Vice President for Academic Affairs/Registrar · Prof. John Doyle, Vice-President for Research · Prof. Derek Hand, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences · Prof. Anne Looney, Executive Dean, DCU Institute of Education · Prof. Blánaid White, Executive Dean, Faculty of Science and Health · John Kilcoyne, Director of Finance · Gareth Yore, Director of Human Resources · Dr Declan Raftery, Chief Operations Officer · Laura Mahoney, Executive Director of External Engagement
10am-10.25am	Meeting with Area reporting Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Prof. Anne Sinnott, DCU Deputy President
10.30am-1:45pm	PRG Private Meeting Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peer Review Group
1.45pm-2pm	Briefing with Area Head and Director of QPO on key recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rachel Keegan, <i>Director of Quality and Institutional Research</i> · Céline Crawford, <i>Director of Communications,</i>
2pm-2.30pm	PRG Exit Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · PRG · CME staff