University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork

Quality Improvement / Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Audio Visual Services Unit

Academic Year 2000/2001

MEMBERS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

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Timetable

The timetable for the conduct of the review visit is attached as Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

At the outset the Peer Review Group would like to compliment the Audio Visual Services Unit on the obvious hard work and effort that went into compiling the self assessment report. The Peer Review Group would also like to thank the staff of the Unit for the level of co-operation and candidness they displayed throughout the course of the review.

METHODOLOGY

Given the overall number of people working in the Audio Visual Services Unit, the Peer Review Group functioned as a team throughout the review process and did not delegate specific responsibilities to specific members of the group. Initially, the group met with the head of the Unit, followed by a meeting with all staff collectively. The Peer Review Group then met with individual members of staff, followed by a meeting with a representative group of users, representatives of the Students' Union, members of the senior administrative staff to which the Audio Visual Services Unit reports or staff from other related areas of the College. The Peer Review Group also toured some of the facilities for which the Audio Visual Services Unit is responsible.

SELF ASSESSMENT REPORT

While the Peer Review Group felt that the self assessment report was of good quality, it did note a number of possible improvements that could be considered for the future in conducting such assessments:

1.   Preparation – the preparatory documents circulated by the Quality Promotions Unit suggest that a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis should be completed as part of the self assessment process. The Peer Review Group noted that the Unit did not complete such an analysis in this particular instance and would suggest that this exercise be carried out in any future self assessment exercise.

2.   Questionnaire – the Peer Review Group noted that while there was a high response rate to the service questionnaire from the Medical Faculty, the response from the remainder of the University was relatively low. It is suggested that should the Unit experience this problem in the future, it might consider the use of focus groups or user groups to gather feedback and assessment information.

3.   Organisational Structures – some members of the Peer Review Group are aware that there has been some discussion with respect to how small units such as the Audio Visual Services Unit might be included in the quality promotion process. That is, the question of whether they should be assessed as a stand alone unit vis-à-vis part of a larger organisational structure has been mooted. In this particular instance, the Peer Review Group would be of the view that while the Audio Visual Services Unit is small in size, a specialist area such as this has benefited from a stand alone review process and, while this may not be suitable in all such cases, it proved most beneficial in this case in identifying areas for development in a unit which provides a vital service to the University community.

FINDINGS

PLANNING

The Audio Visual Services Unit spends much of its time dealing with many different requests. As stated in their self assessment report, "the Unit has taken on everything it has ever been asked to do". The Self Assessment Report highlights that "the lack of a clear, fully defined set of expectations of the Audio Visual Services Unit by College, is possibly the single most frustrating and counter productive issue for them".

While understanding their frustration, the Peer Review Group believes it to be misplaced. One of the defining characteristics of a university is the diversity of the activities and approaches taken to address different issues. It is extremely difficult for central authority to give precise specifications to each individual unit – rather universities improve by giving freedom to those individual units to push forward their own objectives and vision within an overall policy framework.

The Peer Review Group strongly recommends that the Audio Visual Services Unit rapidly concludes it own planning process. In that respect, the Peer Review Group notes the action plan contained in section 3.2 of the Self Assessment Plan and recommends that all items in 3.2 be implemented by 1 March, 2002, and that a new Self Assessment Report be concluded in the light of the implementation of those action items. This report should be concluded by end of March.

TEACHING SUPPORT SERVICES

A number of issues relating to teaching support services were noted.

There is a sense of frustration within the Audio Visual Services Unit at their lack of involvement in the planning and commissioning of new buildings. This, they argue, results in expensive retro-fitting of these teaching facilities. However, staff acknowledged that this situation is improving. The Peer Review Group recommends that as a matter of policy, the Audio Visual Services Unit be involved in the specification of all new teaching facilities and in the refurbishment of existing teaching areas.

Discussions with academic staff suggested that there are some concerns with the provision of audio visual equipment in central teaching areas. Much of the concerns centered on the delay in having broken equipment replaced. There are no clearly articulated guidelines on how users should report faults. The Peer Review Group noted the improvements that have taken place in the equipment over the last number of years and specifically in the provision of data projectors.

The Peer Review Group acknowledges the positive assessment of the Audio Visual Services Unit by the Students' Union representatives. The Peer Review Group noted that it was the failure of some individual teachers to use the equipment provided that caused problems for students in the classroom.

The Peer Review Group recommends a separate budget within the to the Audio Visual Services budget for equipment for central teaching areas.

INFORMATION

There is widespread disparity in the knowledge of services offered by the Audio Visual Services Unit across faculties. Staff in a number of faculties appear not to know of some of the very useful services that can be offered by the Audio Visual Services Unit. This position needs to be addressed urgently.

The Audio Visual Service Unit needs to decide on the services that it wishes to offer and to promote its activities aggressively within the College using appropriate media. In doing this, we recommend that they give consideration to changing the title of their Unit. The Head of the Unit should be free to decide to use either internal staff or external contractors. The revenue it generates for its activities should be used to hire contract staff in expanding the Unit.

RESOURCES

There are two areas of the Unit where human resources would appear to need attention – administrative and photographic/graphic design. That is, there appears to be increased demand for administrative work and general work associated with supporting the general teaching areas and equipment. Cork University Hospital and Medical School are also placing demands on the graphic/photographic staff. As stated previously, such demands could be met by hiring contract staff which could be funded by increased revenue.

Financially, it would appear that the Unit has suffered a more drastic reduction in its recurrent budget than other departments of College. It is particularly unfortunate that this has resulted in a delay in the replacement of ageing overhead projectors in common teaching areas and in the elimination of the Units stock of spares (e.g. bulbs for overhead projectors and data projectors)

The Unit appears to have a comprehensive equipment base in all areas of production and presentation with no apparent deficiencies in its equipment base. As outlined above, we recommend that this be marketed more aggressively to users inside and outside the University.

WORK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The photographer and graphic designer have well defined roles and are largely self directed. The allocation of work to the other technicians seems to require a large amount of supervision, with none of these technicians having clearly defined areas of responsibility but seemingly being 'jacks of all trades'.

The paper based system of work management requires on-going meetings and reviews of work in progress. It would appear to place a heavy burden on the Senior Executive Assistant to keep this system up-to-date. A computerised database system, accessible to all of the Unit's staff, would enable all to have overview and would reduce the number of meetings and reviews presently needed.

SERVICES LEVEL

Users have an expectation that the lecture space audio visual equipment will work and that when it does not, that the Audio Visual Services Unit will make a speedy response to repair/replace the defective equipment or to assist the user.

They also expect that they can have support for evening, weekend and special events, that the Audio Visual Services Unit will be open and accessible to them during the working day and that they can contact the Audio Visual Services Unit on a helpline when they are having difficulties.

In practice, this would appear not to be the case. The absence of a customer charter setting out the services and response that a user can reasonably expect has given rise to false expectation. The reliance on Security Services Operatives to clean and replace teaching space equipment and advising the Audio Visual Services Unit of defective equipment does not appear to work. The front line support models need to be urgently reviewed. If the present use of Security Services Operatives is to continue, then a Service Level Agreement between the Unit and the Buildings and Estates Office needs to be put in place and closely monitored. Otherwise, the Audio Visual Services Unit should have its own Departmental Operative to check on the condition of all audio visual equipment in central teaching areas and to carry out other appropriate duties.

A helpline to the Audio Visual Services Unit needs to be set up and advertised to the users. This helpline should be manned at all times during the working day. The support

technicians should be contactable at all times when on campus. The current practice of using the technicians' personal mobile phones should be discontinued and they should be supplied with bleepers.

CORK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL / MEDICAL SCHOOL

The existing arrangement of support provided to the academic staff at Cork University Hospital (CUH) and the Medical School is placing considerable strain on both the members of the Audio Visual Services Unit staff involved and their related core audio visual workload.

An assessment of the service requirements of CUH and the Medical School must be undertaken. In the case of CUH, the assessment must make comparisons to other applicable teaching hospitals and particular reference to the legal issues which exist within the greater area of patient care (e.g. patient consent, image management, accurate image production for prognosis; patient information, etc).

Once the requirements of the CUH and the Medical School are known, a case for the necessary staff and equipment requirements should be drafted and a business case made to the relevant named contacts of CUH / SHB and the Medical Faculty. If such support is either unacceptable or presently not cost effective for CUH or the Medical Faculty, the recommendation is that the University consider withdrawing existing support to help bolster the core needs of the University.

PRICING

An assessment of the existing "charging" structure has to take place. Any existing services which carry a charge should be reviewed both against comparable services available outside the University environment and what it is actually costing the Audio Visual Services Unit. Internal costs should be double checked to ensure that the existing charges do in fact cover these services (e.g. material charges and VAT where applicable for certain internal services, and manhours, hardware depreciation, etc., for external clientele).

It is suggested the results of this list of chargeable services highlight the areas / services in which it is more cost-effective for University staff to use in-house audio visual services and which areas should be subcontracted.

In these areas, working relationships should be developed so University work can be filtered to these sub-contracted companies, under the management of the Audio Visual Services Unit.

Comparable 'carer' services should also be highlighted for the services that are more cost effectively undertaken in-house, as a 'safety net' / contingency plan is the case of hardware failure in-house, etc.

Charges for services provided by the Audio Visual Services Unit and other such units in College must be transparent and consistent. Specifically, the situation where academic departments pay for the audio visual services but some parts of central administration do not, must be resolved as a matter of urgency.

IT COLLABORATION

It makes sense that, as technology advances within the Audio Visual Services Unit and the University as a whole, links to the Computer Centre could only be beneficial. An approach should be made to consider cross-over areas where IT support would be helpful/applicable. These include:

➢ The existing paperwork used to manage the Audio Visual Services Unit puts undue pressure on services administration staff and work reaction times. The Computer Centre could assist in the development of an 'Access' database, which would provide both an easier management system and also provide access to all members of staff to support their colleagues in this process.

➢ The area of publicising the service and keeping the Audio Visual Services Unit's client database informed of developments would be best driven through an inter/intranet site. This vehicle can develop at the same pace as the service itself can manage, and in a more cost effective manner. The Computer Centre have a

knowledge base of web site design, management and support and such assistance would take considerable pressure off the Audio Visual Services Unit, with the additional benefit that the Computer Centre would be best placed to know the net access and computer compatibility of Audio Visual's client base.

➤ Network allocation and support for Audio Visual Services Unit clientele to send files electronically, e.g., completed work with client approval for immediate output and general work requests which may contain attached existing photographic files, etc.

➤ The development of a computer server so that presentation files can saved and then accessed in all applicable teaching areas of the College without the (software / hardware) compatibility problems which emerge when using external hardware.

CAPITAL PLANNING

The specialist knowledge base which exists within the Audio Visual Services Unit is presently not being used effectively in the area of capital planning.

Within the largest budget expenditure which the University undertakes, opportunities to ease the installation of integrated presentation systems have not always been taken . The net result of this has been additional expenditure both for the University and the Audio Visual Services Unit.

It is suggested that the relevant planning departments are provided with a set of guidelines, highlighting the specific areas in which the Audio Visual Services Unit should be involved and consulted in the development of new capital projects.

UTILISATION OF EQUIPMENT

The Peer Review Group was impressed by the studio and teleconferencing facilities available in the Audio Visual Services Unit. That said, the Peer Review Group were not convinced that this equipment is being utilised to its full potential. Consideration should be given to ideas such as use by Public Affairs for media training, increased production of video and audio programming and possible commercial use of the facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Peer Review Group has set out its recommendations in point form below:

1.   That the Audio Visual Services Unit rapidly concludes its planning process and implements the action points set out in section 3.2 of the Self Assessment Report.

2.   That following the completion of one above, the Audio Visual Services Unit prepare a new self assessment report. (This report should be concluded by the end of March, 2002).

3.   That as a matter of policy, the Audio Visual Services Unit be involved in the specification of all teaching facilities and in the refurbishment of existing areas and that the Unit be informed and consulted in the early planning stages of all new capital developments requiring audio visual services and facilities.

4.   That a separate budget be established to support the purchase of equipment for central teaching areas.

5.   That the Audio Visual Services Unit clearly define the services that it wishes to offer and promote its activities aggressively within the College using appropriate media.

6.   That the Audio Visual Services Unit give consideration to changing its name to something which is more descriptive of the full range of services available.

7.   That any revenue generated by the Audio Visual Services Unit be available to it to develop its services or hire new staff.

8.   That the demand placed on technical and administrative staff be considered in the context of adding new contract staff, funded by the revenue generated from providing new and expanded services.

9. That the Audio Visual Services Unit work with the Computer Centre to establish a computerised database to manage the work of the Unit. Such a system should include a full maintenance record and schedule for all audio visual equipment in general teaching rooms.

10. That the Audio Visual Services Unit establish a customer charter which clearly sets out the service expectations for the Unit.

11. That the Audio Visual Services Unit establish a service level agreement with the General Services area, clearly setting out duties and responsibilities, vis-à-vis, the Audio Visual technicians and Security Services Operatives' role in maintenance and troubleshooting audio visual equipment in the general teaching areas.

12. That the Audio Visual Services Unit establish a helpline (similar to the one currently in use in the Computer Centre). This helpline should be manned throughout the working day and should be capable of providing basic troubleshooting and technical advice.

13. That technicians should be issued with bleepers so as they are contactable throughout the day.

14. That the Audio Visual Services Unit immediately undertake a needs assessment with the Medical School and Cork University Hospital, paying particular attention to the issue of clinical photography services and that following on from that review, the Audio Visual Service Unit agree with the Medical School and Cork University Hospital the level of services which are to be provided, the resource implications for all concerned and the legal liability and responsibilities involved.

15. That the Audio Visual Services Unit carry out a review of its pricing structure to ensure that it remains competitive relative to outside providers and that once a price list has been developed, it should be distributed widely throughout the College.

16. That the Audio Visual Services Unit work with the Computer Centre to develop a strategy to improve integrated IT/AV services in the general teaching areas, e.g. electronic file transfer, main server presentation storage, etc.

17. That the Audio Visual Services Unit develop its own internet site with a view to providing on-line services.

18. That a review of the utilisation of equipment in the Audio Visual Services Unit (e.g. teleconferencing, (studio and editing equipment) be carried out with a view to increasing same and possibly increasing revenue through possible commercial use.

19. That the Audio Visual Services Unit seek to collaborate with the Department of Human Resources and the Academic Council Committee on Staff Development to offer training courses to all staff in the use and troubleshooting of audio visual equipment.

CONCLUSION

The Audio Visual Services Unit is characterised by highly skilled staff with a strong commitment to high quality. It has the potential to make an even greater contribution to the teaching services of the University and to offer greater production services. The Peer Review Group was impressed by the enthusiasm of all personnel we interviewed for the expansion and development of the services that the Audio Visual Services Unit offers.

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Mr. Noel Keeley   **Professor Ciaran Murphy**
Chair, PRG   *Int. PRG Member*

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Mr. Andrew Craig   **Mr. Michael Chapman**
Ext. PRG Member   *Ext. PRG Member*

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Group Site Visit to review the Audio Visual Unit

Monday 27 August

18.00   Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.
Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified.

20.00   Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and
Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

Tuesday 28 August

08.30   Convening of Peer Review Group

09.00   <u>Consideration of Self-Assessment Report</u>

           09.00 Meeting with Tony Perrott, Head of Unit
           09.30 Meeting with all staff of Unit
           10.30 coffee/tea with all staff
           11.00 meeting with all staff of unit
           12.00 meetings with individual members of staff

13.00   Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group

13.30   Visit to Medical Illustration Unit, Cork University Hospital. (T. Perrott to escort
group on visit)

14.30   Visit to core facilities of Department (T. Perrott to escort group on tour)

15.00   <u>Meeting with representative selections of staff and users</u>

           Dr. Maeve Conrick, Dept. of French
           Dr. Rob Elsner, Dept. of Nutrition
           Dr. Anita Maguire, Dept. of Chemistry
           Dr. Finnuala Ni Chiardha, Dept. of Physiology

15.45   Ms. Joanne Murphy, Education Officer, Students' Union and Mr. Cathal O'Sullivan,
Welfare Officer, Students' Union

16.00   Mr. Michael O'Sullivan, Vice-President, Planning, Communications & Development

16.20   Mr. Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary

16.40   Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar

17.00   Mr. Michael O'Halloran, Head of User Services, Computer Centre

| 17.20 | Tour of UCC campus |
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| 19.00 | Working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group |

Wednesday 29 August

| 08.30 | Convening of Peer Review Group |

| 09.00 | Preparation of first draft of final report |

| 12.00 | Meeting with Mr. Tony Perrott, Head of Unit, to clarify any outstanding issues |

| 12.30 | Exit presentation, made by Mr. Noel Keeley, Chair of the Peer Review Group and Professor Ciaran Murphy, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. |

| 13.00 | Working Lunch, including finalisation of arrangements for submission of final Report |

| pm | Externs depart |