Computer Centre

Peer Review Group:
 Mr. C. O'Brien, Academic Secretary, UCC (Chair)
 Dr. R. Studdert, Department of Computer Science, UCC
 Mr. J. O'Connell, Director, Computer Centre, NUI Maynooth
 Mr. D. Wolfe, Consultant, Brown University, USA

Brief description of conduct of site visit
The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 12th to 14th February 2002 and included meetings with

i)	Director and staff of the unit as a group and individually
ii)	Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students
iii)	Representatives of users in UCC
iv)	Professor A. Hyland, VP
v)	Mr. N. Keeley, VP for Human Resources
vi)	Mr. M. O'Sullivan, VP for Planning, Communications & Development
vii)	Mr. G. Harrington, Director, Office of Buildings & Estates
viii)	Mr. M. F. Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/VP for Administration & Finance
ix)	Mr. A. Perrott, Head, Audio Visual Services Unit

and visits to unit facilities in UCC.

An exit presentation of the principal findings of the Peer Review Group was made to staff of the department in the afternoon of the second day.

Description of Computer Centre

Director of Unit: Mr. M. Hayes
No. of Staff: 32 full-time members of staff and a number of student helpers
Functions of Unit:
➢ To provide academic and administrative computing services in UCC
➢ To provide IT support to meet the needs of UCC
➢ To develop integrated IT services to meet the needs of UCC.

Mission Statement:
" To provide an integrated information service through leadership in identifying the technological developments of potential benefit to the College and responding to the changing needs of the College while satisfying its existing requirements."

Aims & Objectives
To provide the following services to the College:
➢ Planning, development and management of the central IT infrastructure
➢ Development, implementation, maintenance and support for all central applications
➢ IT services for all students and for academic and administrative departments
➢ Network services, including email and Internet connectivity for all staff and students
➢ Evaluation, approval and management of IT projects
➢ Investigation and evaluation of emerging technologies
➢ Consultancy for departments
➢ Assistance with the procurement and installation of IT equipment
➢ IT training
➢ Project management.

General Comment on Quality Review

The reviewers were impressed with the comprehensive nature of the Self-Assessment Report. They acknowledged the hard work in preparing the Self-Assessment Report on the part of all staff in the Computer Centre and in particular on the part of the Committee co-ordinating the self-assessment exercise. The use of questionnaires to determine the views of users was considered appropriate and adequate. The reviewers noted, however, the relatively low response from staff in the Computer Centre to the staff questionnaire.

The reviewers were surprised to find no reference to governance issues in the Self-Assessment Report, which the group considered central in shaping the Centre's relationships with key users in the institution and in achieving a shared set of expectations and corresponding funding provision.

The reviewers found that the resources provided to the Computer Centre fall short of levels recommended in a number of reviews conducted on the Centre since 1997. Since then, the demands on the Computer Centre for IT services have continued to grow in volume and in complexity. Recommendations for higher levels of resources in these reviews raised expectations among staff in the Computer Centre and among users generally. The lack of action in remedying financial deficiencies has contributed to a less than adequate level of service in a number of areas. This, in turn, has led to vocal dissatisfaction from groups of users and resulted in a degree of helplessness and a level of disaffection from staff in the Computer Centre. The unfulfilled expectations of resources has led to a sub-optimal use of the resources available, which was not overcome despite the enthusiasm and dedication of staff members in the Computer Centre. Notwithstanding the many pressures on the university budget the group concluded that action needs to be taken immediately, to provide additional resources, to allow the Computer Centre to discharge effectively its core functions of providing IT infrastructure and targeted IT services.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

Space is a major resource issue within UCC. The Computer Centre is prioritising acquiring space for provision of open-access computing facilities for students ahead of provision of staff offices or facilities for the Computer Centre itself. There has been a very large increase in information technology growth over the past ten years which ahs not been reflected in growth in the Computer Centre. The pervasiveness of information technology and its use is increasing exponentially. Thus the Computer Centre feels the University should acknowledge this fact in the allocation of core resources in the institution. There is a need to reflect the future needs of the university in IT provision rather than past needs.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. '03
Establishment of a University Policy Committee of GB to oversee computing in UCC.	The QPC endorsed this recommendation but questioned the proposed size of the new committee. It was agreed to refer the structure of the proposed committee to Deans-EMG, who will be asked to send a proposal forward to the GB.	Implemented. The IT Policy Committee was established by GB and is chaired by the Registrar and VP for Academic Affairs. The Committee has representatives of Deans of Faculties. The Committee has met once to date but does plan to meet 3 times per year from 2003/04.
Increased funding should be made available to address	The QPC noted that the issue of staffing has already been	- Some replacement and additional staff have been appointed in 2002.

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under-resource in staff, space and money and linked to achievement of satisfactory performance levels.	positively considered by the University. The QPC recommended that the space requirement issue should be dealt with by the Space Committee (a subgroup of the Buildings Committee)	No additional staff have been appointed since the report on the review was approved by GB. - Some space has been made available for student computing facilities. No additional space has been made available for CC staff since the review. Applications have been made to the Space Committee by the Head of Department and are under consideration. - The financial resourcing issues have not been dealt with to date. It is the view of the CC that, while recognising the difficulties of resource allocation, the Centre is not receiving adequate resources for the size of the University. No significant adjustments have been made to the budget of the CC since the review.
Co-ordination of services provided by Buildings & Estates, CC and Audio Visual Services	The QPC agreed with this recommendation and recommended that the Office of B&E address the issue.	Implementation of this recommendation is on-going. Some progress has been made.
That the Department of HR recognise and address the staff development issues in the CC	The QPC recommended that the Department of HR should assist the CC in the identification of development needs. Leadership in the issue should be taken by the management of the CC.	The CC has a staff development programme underway. The CC has not involved the Department of HR in this. To date the Head has met with all staff to discuss individual needs. Training of staff in the CC must be a continuous activity as new developments come on line. One issue is that because of the shortage of staff the release of staff for training causes difficulties for the staff member's section.
The organisation of the CC should be restructured to optimise performance and plan for additional staff	The PC endorsed this recommendation and determined action on it to be a matter for the management of the CC.	Not implemented. The Director of the CC is of the view that action on the restructuring should await the outcome of a proposal under consideration by Deans-EMG in relation to recommendation 6 below.
A Deputy CC Director should be appointed from among the existing unit heads and paid an allowance for same	The QPC endorsed the recommendation from the VP for Planning, Communications & Development that 2 posts at Assistant/Deputy Director be filled on a competitive basis through external advertising and not on the basis of an allowance paid to existing staff.	The filling of the posts is under active consideration by Deans- EMG and a decision is hoped for by mid-November 2003.

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The Director of the CC should be an ex officio member of key university committees, as appropriate	This recommendation is linked to earlier recommendations. The QPC endorsed this recommendation.	Not implemented. Action: Director of QPU to pursue with Secretary of Buildings Committee
Develop the potential of resources in systems networking	QPC noted that action on this is underway	On-going.
A Business Resumption Plan for all key administrative functions should be put in place, and sufficient resources identified to execute plans, if necessary	Welcomed and noted by the QPC. This is an intrinsic function of management.	Recommendation is being implemented in stages. The Plan is complete for the Student Records System and action on some aspects is on-going. However some actions are dependent on space resources.
Review the role of the Electronic Publishing Group.	Part of the review of the management of the CC will be to review the deployment of staff and, if necessary, to re-deploy elsewhere within the CC. The CC should liaise with the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) with regards to the UCC web site. Professor Moran agreed to convene a group to consider the web site and to facilitate liaison between the CC and the OPA	Implemented. Changes in the roles of the Electronic Publishing Group have been made. A new UCC website has been developed and is under constant review.
Rotate permanent staff manning the Helpdesk.	QPC endorsed this recommendation	Implemented. Rotation includes long-term contract staff.
Prioritisation of requests for assistance	QPC noted this is already happening	Implemented.
Open tender procedures for suppliers of Desktop equipment should be put in place. Development and execution of a central purchase process of basic desktop equipment. Following implementation of this recommendation reduce level of support for machines purchased independently of CC. Maintain small stock of machines, configured to a standard configuration	QPC requested that the CC report back to the next meeting of the QPC. The consideration of service to Mac users was emphasised. Consideration should be given to the following questions: ♦ Should there be some support for Mac users in UCC? ♦ What should that support consist of?	Recommendation re suppliers of Desktop equipment: Implemented. Consideration of a central purchase process is underway. New machines are very quickly delivered to the user. Delays are still being experienced in the setting up of the computers and the transfer of data from the old computer due to scarcity of staff resources. The CC is in agreement that there should be support for Mac users in UCC. However the difficulty lies in acquiring staff with the requisite skills.
Recruit students with IT skills to support staff on Helpdesk	QPC endorsed recommendation. Need for good interpersonal skills emphasised in addition to IT skills	Implemented.
Develop call management	QPC endorsed recommendation	Consideration of implementation of

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system and Helpdesk tools	and noted action by CC	this recommendation is underway. Tenders have been received and proposals are under consideration currently.
Establish and implement appropriate service level agreements with key stakeholders.	QPC asks that the CC pursue the benchmarking of the activities and service levels against those in similar universities, especially in Ireland, and reports back to the QPC. Performance management indicators should be identified	The CC is of the view that there is no point in benchmarking service provision until the resources and staffing in UCC are equivalent to those in similar universities. For example: TCD has ~65 staff compared to 40 in UCC. In overall aspects in terms of what services are provided UCC is similar to most other Irish Universities.
Review existing services	As above	On-going.
Computer Centre should expand the use of CBT training, provide quality documentation and consider factoring out specialist courses to improve efficiency	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks the CC to report back on the timescale for implementation	Implemented. Provision of CBT is now at a very high level in UCC (e.g. ECDL training, etc. – see http://www.ucc.ie:8080/cocoon/cc/training/homepage for details). From October 2003 separate courses were made available to all 1st Year students following representations from the Students Union.
Existing training staff should spend time working as part of User Support	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks the CC to report back on the timescale for implementation	Implemented.
Should seek to increase effectiveness of existing stock of open access PCs	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks the CC to report back on the timescale for implementation	Implemented and on-going. At the time of the review 150 open-access PCs were available in UCC. There are now 400 and this will rise to 600 shortly.
Printing facilities for students should be improved, common pricing system should apply	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks the CC to report back on the timescale for implementation	Implemented. The CC does not charge for printing but some units do charge.
Provision of public kiosks should be expanded	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks the CC to report back on the timescale for implementation	Implemented. Public kiosks have proved to be a very useful and valuable addition to the facilities for students at UCC. Ideally for the number of students in UCC there should be 150 such kiosks. At the time of the QR there were 17 public kiosks in UCC. This number has been expanded to 69 at present. Plans are being discussed for an additional 60 in the Boole Basement but difficulties are presently being encountered to

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		implementation of these plans.
CC should provide consultancy and project management skills in the successful implementation of Educational Technology initiatives	QPC welcomed this action	Implemented.
Continue to develop and maintain infrastructure	Endorsed by QPC	On-going action is being undertaken by CC.
Improve service delivery and response times	QPC requested a response to its next meeting on the details of how the focussed review will be carried out.	The CC is continuing to strive to improve the quality of service provided.
Staff should be encouraged to create an environment where, consistently, the Centre is seen to accept the ownership of all problems presented to them.	QPC requested further information	CC accepts ownership of all relevant problems appropriate to CC. In addition the CC is committed to assist wherever possible in solving problems that are not the responsibility of the CC.
Ensure Systems Administrators are part of a wider IT community	QPC recommended the setting up of a Users Group, in to which the Systems Administrators (SAs) would contribute. A list of existing SAs should be generated. Consideration should be given as to whether the deployment of staff as SAs is the most appropriate and best arrangement. QPC would prefer an efficient working relationship between the SAs and the CC. Discussions as to the best management of the staff resources should take place and involve the CC	Implemented.

The Users Group has been set up and meets ~4 times per year. In addition extensive use is made of discussion lists and other forms of communication so that networking is a continuous activity. |
| Every department should have a liaison person who would work with the CC | QPC recommended the setting up of a Users Group with faculty representatives. A member from every department would generate too large a body. | The CC is working towards establishing a Users Group within each Faculty as a more productive way forward on this issue. |
| Increase staffing levels to meet existing needs | Noted. QPC agreed that increased staff should be linked to performance and improvement in provision of service. | Not implemented.

To date no additional staff beyond those taken on in 2002 have been allocated. |
| Consideration should be given to the provision of additional resources to cope with expanding academic demands in teaching and research | Issue should be referred to the IT Policy Committee which it is recommended be put in place. | Director of CC will bring the issue to the November 2003 meeting of the IT Policy Committee. Significant levels of support were provided for Blackboard without additional staffing resources. |

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Staff should bring forward for implementation IT policies including security to protect the integrity of IT infrastructure and services	QPC endorsed recommendation.	Implemented. A number of policies and draft policies have been put in place and will form part of the Policies and procedures web site being developed a the moment. A wide consultation has taken place across the university and is still on-going concerning the content of the policies. Issues arise on an on-going basis.
Staff should develop a comprehensive suite of information technology practices for UCC	QPC endorsed recommendation. QPC requested report on action on this recommendation for next meeting.	