<div align="center">

QUALITY REVIEW FOLLOW-UP MEETING

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE (DSS)

</div>

Introduction

A meeting to discuss progress made in implementing recommendations for improvement arising from the quality review of the Disability Support Service was held on 22 October 2007.

Present :   Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
              Mr Denis Staunton, Director of Access
              Ms Mary O'Grady, Disability Support Officer
              Dr Norma Ryan, Director, Quality Promotion Unit
              Ms Deirdre O'Brien, Administrator, Quality Promotion Unit

Comment

'Fitness to practice' has emerged as an area of increasing difficulty for DSS with many disabled students experiencing difficulties registering with professional bodies once graduated. Difficulties have also arisen with the choice of appropriate work placements for disabled students. This is a University wide issue and University policy in this respect is required.

The following review is covered under six headings:

1. Funding of the DSS
2. Communications
3. Liaison With Academic Departments / Quality Teaching & Learning
4. Quality Student Experience
5. DSS Internal Organisation/Operation - Quality Staff Experience

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group   *VP: Vice-President*
QPC: Quality Promotion Committee   *QIP: Quality Improvement Plan*
HR: Human Resources   *DSS: Disability Support Service*
SSMG: Student Services Management Group   *HE: Higher Education*
NAO: National Access Office

1. Funding of the DSS		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
That over-dependency on external funding should be addressed as a matter of urgency, particularly as opportunities are now presenting for restructuring of budgets. -------------------- That the issue of the over-dependency on external funding for the DSS, making any strategic plans for future years difficult and leaving staff uncertain of their future, needs to be	Noted that the University is addressing this issue and are aware of the need to ensure the continued support of the work of the DSS. -------------- Endorsed. QPC noted that the University needs to support mainstreaming of the funding for the DSS and that the HR issues must be resolved. Noted DSS is discussing issues with	Implemented and ongoing Four posts have been paid for through ACCESS funding. Two of these posts have been mainstreamed.

1. Funding of the DSS		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
addressed as a matter of urgency. -------------------- That, in the move to a different budgetary structure in the University, sufficient funds are made available • to transfer core posts from contract to permanent positions • to maintain and further develop the level of service of the unit • to ensure that such funds are both ring-fenced and audited and achieving the intended purpose of improving the DSS**.**	the Registrar. ------------- Noted. QPC referred to earlier comments.	
ESF Fund for Students with Disabilities • Earlier allocation of funding from NAO for first time applicants • Set a cost on assessment of needs for funding application • NAO to facilitate more "Group Funding Applications" e.g. Tutor Support, Note taking and transport support • Integrate financial management of funds to new ITS database which should streamline administration for reporting requirements • Report on expenditure under group headings rather than on individual basis ----------------------- That a new integrated data system, fully aligned to central administration ITS system, is put in place for academic year 2006/07 and that staff at the DSS are trained in the operation of this new system before next academic year.	Endorsed. --------------- Endorsed. Noted that work on this system is already underway in the University	Ongoing Many improvements have been made. The NAO now facilitate group funding applications. DSS can submit for funding to the NAO under the following group headings: • Note Taking Support • Learning Support • Mental Health Difficulties ------------------------ The DSS database is now fully integrated with the ITS system and provides a greatly improved source of information on students with disabilities and their funding records.
That further funding is allocated from the core budget of the University to address access issues on campus in a more holistic way to meet the needs of the full range of impairments to	Noted that this is an issue for the University to address in the actions arising from the strategic plan for the University.	Ongoing This recommendation is for the University to address. DSS continue to support and welcome this recommendation.

1. Funding of the DSS		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
ensure inclusive environment.		

2. Communication		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
That communication with all stakeholders is improved *See PRGR for details of specific actions recommended to address this issue*	Endorsed.	Implemented The DSS website is now AAA compatible (for visually impaired students with JAWS software). The email and web address have been simplified for ease of access. Students are contacted via text message and the DMIS system is used for informing academics of students with disabilities studying in their modules.
That DSS keep abreast of developments regarding discussions on new posts such as the Dean of Student Affairs or Director of Access. That, whatever model of governance is adopted for DSS, it avoids duplication of services and allows for maximum integration of students with a disability.	Endorsed the need for better coordination and avoidance of duplication of service provision.	Implemented and ongoing A Director of Access has been appointed.
That every opportunity for synergy between units who are providing student support should be exploited.	Endorsed.	Implemented and ongoing DSS continues to hold regular meetings with other student services reporting to Vice President for Student Experience and other Access staff.

3. Liaison With Academic Departments / Quality Teaching & Learning		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
Teaching and Learning The PRG supported the recommendations made by DSS, including: • That academic staff provide copies of notes on Blackboard at beginning of module delivery. • That guidelines be developed for academic staff on best practice for presentation of information in an accessible formats e.g. DAISY[1] format • That teaching staff audit their existing and all new courses to explore the extent to which they are inclusive to the needs of students with disabilities • That academic staff who are pro-active in supporting students with disabilities are rewarded for their effort financially by the university through the Resource Allocation Model, although not at the level of the individual.	Endorsed. The QPC recommended that DSS work with the Teaching & Learning Support Group to develop a policy on heightened awareness of needs and resources.	Implemented and ongoing • Blackboard is now more accessible for visually impaired students and a large number of academics now make their notes available on Blackboard. • Guidelines have been developed for academic staff teaching students with a disability. There is also a Disability Liaison Representative in each department. • This is a University wide issue and University policy in this respect is required. • Ongoing

4. Quality Student Experience		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
That, if the University is genuinely serious about the student experience for students with disabilities, then a number of strategies need to be developed and maintained such as: • Providing disability awareness as part of the induction training for all new staff, which might include also include a programme such as participation in the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. • Developing a clear relationship between staff promotion opportunities and contribution towards meeting the needs of diverse learners. • Maintaining in research awards and awards for innovative teaching schemes the importance of contribution to a diverse learning environment as criteria for the award. • Inclusion in all new course proposals a section on 'meeting the needs of diverse students' and having a section that requires contact with the Disability Support Officer. • Continuing participation by UCC in national initiatives in universal access to learning opportunities such as 'National initiative to a digital repository of text books'. • Working with the UCC Library on the DAISY standard as best practice in developing a universal accessible centre of information.	Noted this detailed recommendation. Endorsed the development of new and additional strategies by DSS. QPC referred these recommendations to the Disability Support Committee for consideration. QPC would welcome a considered response from DS Committee of the issues raised Some of the actions indicated are already implemented. Some actions should be channelled through the disability representative in each department.	Ongoing DSS will progress the issue of providing disability awareness as part of the induction training for all new staff. DSS will discuss the option of including a module on diversity awareness in the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. DSS currently contribute to the Postgraduate Diploma in Education, Guidance Counselling and Special Educational Needs. DSS are also in discussion with the Department of Education regarding the possibility of providing a postgraduate diploma for teachers facilitating the needs of Vision Impaired students. DSS continues to participate in national initiatives designed to promote inclusion. DSS continues to work with the UCC Library on the DAISY standard as best practice in developing electronic access to texts for Blind and Vision Impaired students. All of the books that have been converted to the DAISY format will form part of the library catalogue.

[1] DAISY: Digital Accessible Information System. Often, the term is used to refer to a standard for producing accessible and navigable multimedia documents. In current practice, these documents are Digital Talking Books, digital text books, or a combination of synchronised audio and text books.

CURRENT STUDENTS:

PRG Recommendation	QPC Recommendation	Follow-up Report Oct '07
Support for Students with Mental Health difficulties - That the DSS and Student Counselling and Development Service work collaboratively and use a holistic multi-disciplinary approach to support students with mental health difficulties - That the University sets up a working group to investigate best practice in inclusion, integration and support of students with mental health difficulties in higher education. The working group would liaise with FÁS on enabling graduates with mental health difficulties make a successful transition to employment	Endorsed. QPC recommended that the Registrar liaise with the heads of DSS, Student Counselling and development, Student Health and the Chaplaincy as to how to proceed.	Ongoing A working group comprising of some of the Heads of student services has been set up to explore this issue and develop a University policy on supporting students with Mental Health Difficulties
Student Social Activities - That the University should endeavour to encourage all students to participate fully in the "UCC Experience". - Further work is required especially with Clubs and Societies; simple changes to posters and leaflets could be made to include a statement offering help to those who require it and giving contact details. - That the DSS should liaise further with the Students Union to raise awareness of disabilities and encourage inclusion across campus in sporting and social activities	Recommended that the DSS discuss issues with the Students Union and agree what actions should/can be taken.	Ongoing Representatives from the Students Union are involved in the DSS orientation for all incoming students. DSS is working with the SU and Clubs and Societies to ensure that their information and websites are accessible to students with disabilities. DSS are working with Mardyke staff to make the facility and its activities more inclusive. Two adaptive coaches have been contracted to facilitate disabled students to use the swimming pool. 'Goal ball', a club activity for blind students has been set up.

GRADUATES:		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
Employment of Graduates with Disabilities The PRG supported the detailed recommendations made by the DSS, including: • Build on existing working relationships with Guidance Counsellors to improve access to third level so that students with disabilities are making informed choices on degree options. • Encourage all graduates to develop IT competencies and transferable skills for the workplace by participation in career development programme while in UCC • Continue to support the administration of GET AHEAD, the forum of graduates with disabilities • Work with public and private employers and FAS to identify and inform cultural change in the workplace and inform new practices thus supporting graduates with disabilities in career development • Further develop the mentoring programme to assist graduates in the first step to employment. • That postgraduate and research opportunities be included in this initiative.	Noted. QPC endorsed the continuation of work in this area and suggested that DSS liaise with the Student Careers Service on this.	Ongoing DSS continues to hold briefing sessions with Guidance Counsellors. DSS encourages all graduates to develop IT competencies and transferable skills for the workplace by participating in a Career Development Programme. DSS will continue to support the administration of GET AHEAD, graduate forum of graduates with disabilities A Cork working party, consisting of UCC, Employers and FAS, has been set up to focus specifically on the employment of people with disabilities in the Cork Region. DSS will further develop the mentoring programme to assist graduates in the first step to employment.

5. DSS Internal Organisation / Operation - Quality Staff Experience		
PRG Recommendation	**QPC Recommendation**	**Follow-up Report Oct '07**
That staff at DSS work in teams in the delivery of their duties and responsibilities. Suggested teams: • Disability Team • Financial Administration Team • Clerical/Data Administration Team ------------------------------------ That the DSS consider other team models for organising their work	Endorsed. QPC would encourage DSS to continually review and reconsider models on an ongoing basis.	Not implemented DSS has considered other models but believes that the model it is currently using is the one best suited to the service. Regular team meetings are held at which information is shared.
That any opportunities that could be availed of to free the DSS from students with academic problems that are not related to identified specific learning difficulties should be explored.	Endorsed in principle.	Implemented The DSS is now clearer regarding its own code of practice in this respect and boundaries have now been strictly defined. All DSS staff adhere to the DSS code of practice in relation to who is eligible to register with DSS.
That DSS develop its boundaries, with clear lines of responsibility in relation to where the responsibility for particular students begins and ends. For example, the unit may wish to consider boundaries in relation to some of the following areas: • *Students with academic difficulties* • *Students with a mental health issue* • *Support for external agencies.* ------------- That a feasibility study be undertaken to evaluate whether the DSS should consider expanding its activities outside of UCC.	*Students with academic difficulties* Endorsed. *Students with a mental health issue* Endorsed. Encouraged stronger links with Student Counselling & Development Service. *Support for external agencies.* Endorsed. The QPC did note some concerns re the workload on the DSS and advised the DSS to proceed in this direction with caution. There should be no diminution of the service provision in UCC if the work is to expand externally.	Implemented and ongoing *Students with academic difficulties* The DSS is now clearer regarding its own code of practice in this respect and boundaries have now been strictly defined. All DSS staff adhere to the DSS code of practice in relation to who is eligible to register with the DSS *Students with a mental health issues* The DSS has developed links with the Student Counselling Service. *Students for external agencies* The DSS is now charging for its service to external agencies. The cost of this service to external agencies will be carefully monitored to ensure cost effectiveness
That effective support mechanisms, including outside supervision, to protect staff from the complex issues	Endorsed recommendation that such support mechanisms should be	Ongoing An external expert has been

they deal with when working with students with disabilities are identified and established.	considered and identified.	brought in occasionally to work on team building and stress relieving skills. However, the issue of external support mechanisms for DSS staff remains to be resolved.
That it would be far more satisfactory if the unit could be housed in a single disability friendly location on the main campus. In addition, the current space does not provide all members of staff with the necessary space for private consultations about sensitive individual matters.	Endorsed.	Ongoing The new facilities in the Library have alleviated some space difficulties. DSS remains of the view that support for students with disabilities should be mainstreamed across campus.
That a marketing strategy be developed for the service in order to raise the profile of DSS within UCC and heighten awareness of the services and supports offered to students with disabilities.	Endorsed. QPC expressed some concerns that expectations may be raised which the DSS may not have the resources to deliver and expressed a word of caution in this regard.	Ongoing DSS collaborates with CIT and undertakes assistive technology assessments for the Cork Colleges of Further Education. The fee charged for this assessment has been increased by the NAO to €500 per assessment.
That the DSS considers the designation of a Deputy Head of Service to ensure continuity and to free some time for the Head to pursue the strategic interests of the unit, which appears to be particularly important at this time.	Noted. QPC noted and support the continuance of discussions with the Director of HR and the Registrar on this matter.	Implemented A Deputy Head of Service has been appointed.
That time needs to be made available for staff to continue to network with other disability support services to keep abreast of best practice and to allow the DSS in UCC to find ways to disseminate their excellent work.	Endorsed.	Implemented and ongoing DSS staff are members of a number of national organisations and attend regular meetings. Information gleaned at these meetings is disseminated to all DSS staff at team meetings thereby sharing the learning experience.
That, in making a case for review staffing levels and terms of employment, the DSS needs to distinguish posts that are essential to the service and posts that are desirable.	Endorsed.	Ongoing DSS believes that all existing posts are essential to the effective delivery of the service.
That the Space Allocation Committee (SAC) allocate further space urgently for staff to meet students for	The QPC noted that the University and the Students Union are addressing the issue of appropriate	Implemented DSS now have extra space for consultations as a result of the

assessments and organization of supports.	space for staff to meet with students and a proposal has been drafted which will be submitted to the Buildings Committee.	new space allocated to them in the Boole library. The space allocated in the library is being used as an Assistive Technology Lab where the AT and Alternative Format needs of students with disabilities are met