Secretary's Office

Peer Review Group:

> Mr. N. Keeley, Director of Human Resources, UCC (Chair)
> Professor P. Woodman, Dean of Arts Faculty, UCC
> Dr. G. Wright, former Secretary, UCD
> Pr. P. West, Secretary, University of Strathclyde, UK

Brief Description of conduct of Site Visit:

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 9th – 11th May 2001 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the unit as a group and individually,
- ii) Representatives of the academic staff,
- iii) Representatives of support service units reporting to the Secretary's Office
- iv) Representatives of external users of the service: Governing Body, College solicitors, estate agents, insurance brokers,
- v) Professor M. A. Moran, Registrar & VP for Academic Affairs.

An exit presentation of the principal findings of the Peer Review Group was made to all the staff of the Secretary's Office in the afternoon of the second day.

Description of Secretary's Office

Head of Unit: Mr. M. Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/VP for Finance & Administration
No. of Staff: 8 administrative staff (7 f/t perm and 1 f/t temp)
Location of Unit: First Floor, East Wing, Main Quadrangle
Responsibilities of Unit:

- ➢ University Statutes
- ➢ University Insurances
- ➢ Legal Affairs
- ➢ Compliance (*Freedom of Information; Data Protection, Copyright Act)*
- ➢ Governing Body
- ➢ University and External Committees

General Comment on Quality Review

The Peer Review Group complimented the Secretary's Office on the obvious hard work and effort that went into compiling the Self-Assessment Report, particularly given the fact that the Secretary's Office was one of the first administrative units in the University to go through the quality assurance process. It was felt that the team of people concerned had a very firm grasp of how the self-assessment process might benefit the office and there was significant evidence that some of the possible improvements identified had been implemented already.

The Peer Review Group did identify a number of possible considerations for the development of future reports that may be of benefit, specifically:

- Swot Analysis – this should be completed in all reviews of administrative units.
- Focus Groups - the Peer Review Group recommended the consideration of the use of focus groups as another way to collect data or information when response to questionnaires is low.
- Organisational Structures – these should be clearly laid out so that the relationship of the administrative office to other offices and units in the university is explicit.
- The Peer Review Group felt that the full rigours of the assessment and review process may have been a little elaborate for such a small group / unit.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendations of the PRG	Recommendation by QPC	Follow-Up Report – Oct. '02
That consideration be given to developing an initiative involving all areas reporting to the SO aimed at enhancing the corporate identity of the office as one unit.	The QPC endorsed the action being taken by the SO	Monthly meetings are scheduled with each head of section on an individual basis. Collective monthly meetings will commence this October. The web site has been improved to reflect the identities of the sections and all sites are linked from the SO site
That consideration be given to developing the existing filing room in terms of adding rolling shelving or other form of efficient document storage and retrieval system.	The QPC endorsed the recommendation. Suggested the SO address the resource implications by (a) defining them and (b) making application to appropriate body within UCC	Not yet implemented because of lack of resources
That the use of the cellar area for storing and retrieving documents be discontinued as soon as possible.	Noted by the QPC	Implemented. Shelving has been purchased for the cooperage area which will accommodate archived files, thus improving situation.
That the decision not to dedicate additional human and financial resources towards the implementation of the FOI Act be reviewed	Noted that this recommendation has been implemented and an additional member of staff has been appointed	Implemented. An Assistant FOI Officer has been appointed and has taken up post. Some assistance has been provided from the office to help with the organisation of training.
That the planned staff meetings in the SO aimed at enhancing communication continue on a regular basis and, where possible, are prioritised over other office business.	The positive action was welcomed by the QPC	Implemented. Meetings are scheduled regularly.
That the volume of information being provided to the GB be reviewed with a view to possibly reducing same and that consideration be given to the introduction of an A and B type agenda format for GB meetings.	The action decided on by the SO was noted by the QPC	Implemented.
That the SO set specific deadlines for receiving materials going to the GB and that these deadlines be adhered to by other depts. and units of the University at all times.	The action decided on by the SO was noted by the QPC	Implemented
That all departments and units who go through the QA process might be encouraged, as part of the SA Report, to develop a mission statement and customer charter.	Endorsed and welcomed by the QPC. It was noted that the Students Union are developing a customer charter for academic departments and that this is a highly appropriate	Implemented. This is now part of the guidelines for all units preparing for review.

Recommendations of the PRG	Recommendation by QPC	Follow-Up Report – Oct. '02
	activity for support/service units.	

Recommendations made by SO	Report on Decisions and Actions taken
Mission Statement A Mission statement should be developed for the Secretary's Office which captures the function of the Office and the contribution it should make to the University and its Strategic Plan.	Unit is working on the draft of the mission statement, which will be posted on the web site when finalised.
Staff Training and Development Based on the mission of the office and the skills required by staff to fulfil the role of the office, individual analysis of the training and development needs of staff should be undertaken and priorities identified for each staff member, to be followed up as budgets allow.	Implementation of this recommendation is on-going. There is very little financial resource to facilitate additional training but some monies are allocated each year.
Office Communication It is recommended that communication within the Secretary's Office be improved through the following channels: ➢ Senior Management (i.e. MFK/MF) brief staff members on relevant information that affect the Secretary's Office discussed at Management/EMG/Committees/GB level. ➢ Administrative Secretary meets with the Administrative Officer on a regular (i.e. bi-monthly or weekly) basis to discuss items which have arisen at office staff meetings and report/brief office staff on their actions/decisions. ➢ It is suggested that briefing/reporting to staff be in written format (i.e. memo, letter or e-mail) ➢ Open communication to be encouraged between office staff and management. ➢ Prioritisation of the management and office meetings take place in order to promote a customer orientated and efficient office.	All implemented.
Physical Location The Secretary's Office is the central administrative unit of the University. Legal documentation and filing and the records of numerous Committees, including Governing Body, are maintained by the Secretary's Office. The system includes approximately 6,500 files of central importance to the University's functioning. The limited physical facilities of the Secretary's Office impose a serious burden on the staff of the office in terms of space and their working environment. It is recommended that suitable space be made available, when the situation permits, to allow staff working space for collation of committee documentation and appropriate filing space for regularly-retrieved files.	Implemented

Recommendations made by SO	Report on Decisions and Actions taken
Office Budget In spite of the continuing increases in the size and complexity of the University and the enhanced role of the Secretary's Office in areas such as legal compliance and insurance matters, the budget allocated to the office has been cut in each of the last two years. This situation needs to be reviewed.	Unit is working within budget as far as is possible. It is impossible to predict legal costs outside the control of the SO. This must be resolved at a level within UCC higher than the SO
Electronic Document Management Funds to be allocated to put an electronic document management system in place.	Progress on implementing this recommendation is on-going within the office. A project is in place for document scanning and retrieval.
Filing Time Space and resources to be allocated to tackle the backlog of filing and the movement of files.	Implemented.
Documentation of Office Procedures Procedures to be documented for areas such as Insurance, Governing Body Elections, Property Transactions, Committees, etc.	Not yet implemented. Will be undertaken during the coming academic year.
Internal Backup System for Staff Staff to have a designated 'back up' person to cover areas of work when absent.	Implemented
Customer Charter It is recommended that a customer charter be drafted by the staff of the office dealing with telephone procedure, speed of response to correspondence, etc.	This is being developed as part of the mission statement (see 1 above).
Legal Expenses As the office with responsibility for legal affairs, all invoices for legal advice, drafting, etc. are currently coded to the Secretary's Office regardless of the office of origin. The substantial costs involved are incurred by other areas of the University but coded to the Secretary's Office. It is recommended that the main areas requiring legal support, namely the Department of Human Resources, the Office of the Vice President for Research and the Buildings & Estates Office, would be granted a set allocation within the Secretary's Office legal expenses budget, which would govern their spending on this area for the year.	This is still under consideration.
Statutes The Secretary's Office is responsible for the drafting and promulgation of statutes. The most widely available source of access to statutes at present is on the University website. The search ability of this site is restricted, thus reducing the accessibility of the statutes to staff and other interested parties. It is recommended that the statutes on the University website be re-formatted in a language such as SGML or XML to make the statutes fully searchable by all staff.	Implemented

Recommendations made by SO	Report on Decisions and Actions taken
Governing Body Regulations Under the University's Act, very little distinction can be made between Statutes and Governing Body Regulations. While the Statutes can currently be found in one location, the Regulations require consolidation both as a resource for administrators and due to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act. It is recommended, therefore, that resources be devoted to the consolidation of the Governing Body Regulations into a single document and website.	Action on this recommendation is not yet complete but is underway.
Governing Body Notice and Documentation It is intended to prepare a schedule of dates by which items would be submitted to the Secretary's Office for inclusion on the Governing Body agenda and for material to be received for circulation.	Implemented
Campus Companies and Wholly-owned Subsidiaries There is a need to formalise the arrangements for monitoring contacts with all campus companies and ensuring that the appropriate authorities in the University are kept informed of the on-going progress of these companies. One of the manifestations of the University's success in the research areas is the emergence of "spin-off companies" in the last few years. There are now six such companies and several more in the pipeline. The University receives shareholdings in the companies and the legal aspects of the arrangements are administered by the Secretary's Office. There is also a trend towards the use of the companies to deal with particular services, e.g. Castlewhite Apartments (UCC) Ltd., Mardyke Leisure (UCC) Ltd. and Property Management (UCC) Ltd. currently being established in a holding company for a staff equity participation scheme in one of our major research centres.	**Campus Companies** The issues relating to campus companies are the remit of the Office of the Vice-President for Research Policy & Support. Proposals have been drafted and ratified by all relevant bodies in the university. **Wholly-owned Subsidiaries** This is in hand and some progress has been made towards rationalisation.
The Quality Procedure has been in operation for a very short time and will be a beneficial exercise for all areas of the University as the procedure becomes more established. The procedure as presently constituted is more suitable to academic departments and many of the questions/issues arising in the documentation provided by the Quality Committee is better suited to those areas of the University. The Secretary's Office recommends that further consideration be given to the implementation of the procedure in administrative units.	Implemented. A set of guidelines has been developed by the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit specifically designed to assist administration and service support units to prepare for review.
The Peer Review Group visit and, in particular, the structure of the two days is unsuited to a small, homogenous department, with facilities in close proximity. A number of visit formats need to be developed to take into account the factors specified so that the Peer Review Group visit is of maximum benefit to each department.	Implemented.