

Accommodations & Student Activities Office

Peer Review Group:

Ms. A. Mills, Admissions Officer, UCC (Chair)
Professor C. Daly, Dean, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, UCC
Mr. B. Kehoe, Director of Student Affairs, DCU
Mr. B. Hamilton, Director of Memorial Union and Student Activities, University of Rhode Island, USA

Brief description of conduct of site visit

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 4^h to 6th February 2003 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually
- ii) Representatives of students
- iii) Representatives of staff of the University
- iv) Representatives of past graduates,
- v) Representatives of the Trade Union bodies and IBEC
- vi) Professor A. Hyland, Vice-President
- vii) Mr. M. F. Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/ Vice-President for Administration & Finance
- viii) Dr. C. O'Sullivan, Chair, Student Needs & Curriculum Development Committee
- ix) Mr. M. Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- x) Dr. J. Tyrrell, Representing the Joint Board

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 Accommodation & Student Activities Office

Head of Unit: Ms. M. O'Neill

No. of Staff: 3 administrative staff

Location of Department: 6 Carrigside, College Road

Mission Statement

"To enrich the student experience at UCC and enhance the university's reputation as a centre of excellence and community service."

Aims & Objectives

- To develop a high quality, student orientated, accommodation service
- To promote active participation in student societies
- To foster mutual respect, responsibility and co-operation between UCC, our students and the wider community.
- To promote the physical facilities of UCC as a conference centre of excellence.

General Comment on Quality Review

The Self-Assessment Report was well prepared and presented, and represented a fair assessment of the Accommodation and Student Activities Office.

The SWOT analysis was confirmed as accurate and during the review it was noted that some of the cost neutral issues identified during the SWOT analysis have already been addressed. The Benchmarking was impressive and highlighted the under provision of UCC owned or managed accommodation. The Benchmarking and review exercise confirmed that the UCC Accommodation and Student Activities Office compares well with similar functions in other Universities. The Service Standards of the unit received some analysis in the report. The PRG noted that the unit had also developed Service Level Agreements with associated services providers in UCC.

A good audit of internal and external users of the service was undertaken and responses were very favourable. While copies of the staff questionnaires used were included, the PRG felt that the report would have been enhanced by the inclusion of completed staff questionnaires.

The Peer Review Group was very impressed with this unit and the manner in which its very committed hard working staff carry out its four core functions (accommodations, societies, conferencing and Campus Watch). The unit has managed to achieve a high level of achievement with their limited resources and have managed to balance their disparate functions throughout the calendar year. While not directly comparable to structures in other universities, it compares favourably with units carrying out similar functions in other institutions.

The unit showed considerable empathy with their brief of providing a service that contributes to the University mission of improving the quality of the student experience. The unit has a good philosophy based on the principle of student development and has been very supportive to Non-EU students.

The level of interactions with user groups and the wider community through Campus Watch, contact with community groups and providers of accommodation particularly impressed the PRG. Their good working relationships with other Units and Departments in UCC was evident in the surveys and in their ability to negotiate Service Level Agreements with a number of other internal service providers. Members of staff of the Accommodation and Student Activities Office are regarded as hardworking, friendly and caring and are perceived to operate well as a team.

Progress on Implementation of Recommendations for Improvement

Introduction

The Peer Review Group identified lack of core staff as a major threat to the quality of services offered by the unit. The unit wish it to be pointed out that all the other Irish universities have devoted considerably more staff and resources to the services covered by the unit. Two of the three staff of the unit are about to move to other posts. The unit needs a realistic core staff complement to ensure continuity and acquisition of expertise in the department.

Notwithstanding the very positive report received from the reviewers and the recommendations in relation to budget allocation and staff resources, the budget of the unit has been cut each year. In these circumstances the unit will struggle to maintain existing services rather than focusing on improving quality. The unit is disappointed that it has gained neither the recommended staffing nor budget increases.

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

VP: Vice-President

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee
 QPU: Quality Promotion Committee

EMG: Executive Management Group
 SU: Students Union

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of the QPC	Follow-up report October 2004
<p>That additional staff be appointed for conferencing and interaction with overseas students.</p>	<p>QPC did not endorse the recommendation as the university is currently reviewing its policy and approach to overseas students. Following decisions on the policy issues, protocols and procedures need to be set up. Both the International Education Office and the Accommodation Office should be involved in the discussions. QPC suggested that an arrangement with an external agency in relation to the management of conferences should be considered rather than appointing staff in UCC for the task.</p>	<p>Liaison with the International Education Office and Admissions Office is continuing re provision for overseas students. No additional staff have been appointed, even though there is a significant increase in the number of international students. Thus there are limitations in what can be achieved.</p> <p>No additional staff have been appointed for management of conferencing activities.</p>
<p>That the web site be upgraded.</p>	<p>Endorsed recommendation</p>	<p>Implemented.</p>
<p>That a Housing Forum be established</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to develop housing policy. • to improve communication between the Accommodation and Student Activities Office, Castlewhite Apartments and additional accommodation providers. • to improve the student experience of campus life. 	<p>QPC strongly endorsed recommendation. QPC recommended that, as part of the activities of the Forum, a target should be to improve the quality and cost of rental accommodation for the students. The President of the Students' Union, the Secretary & Bursar and the Accommodation Officer should be involved in the Forum.</p> <p>However the QPC also recommended that action on this recommendation be suspended until after the report of the consultant has been received (see recommendation 13 below).</p>	<p>Informal meetings take place between concerned parties. The Unit regards the potential of the Housing Forum as a means of providing a forum for dialogue and discussion between all stakeholders of issues. The Accommodations Officer will initiate the setting up of the forum to include the Student Union Welfare officer, the Accommodations Officer, Manager of UCC Campus Accommodation Ltd., Admissions Officer, International Education Student officer and the Student Union President.</p>
<p>That the review of non- pay budget proposed by the Unit should make particular</p>	<p>QPC commended the Accommodation Office on their very efficient use of</p>	<p>The non-pay budget for the Unit has been cut, along with those of all other units in</p>

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reference to publications.	resources but sought clarification as to what the additional resources were required for.	UCC because of the severe financial restrictions the University is operating under currently. In practice this means that only one publication can be replaced per year and thus that many of the publications of the Office are not current.
That the valuable potential role of the Unit in contributing to University Accommodation Policy be more fully utilised.	QPC noted that the Accommodation Officer is a member of the SSMG and is represented on the Joint Board. QPC felt that the membership of the Accommodation Officer on the Housing Forum, if/when established, will enable the recommendation of the PRG to be implemented. The QPC did not endorse the proposal by the Unit. The QPC endorsed the proposal that the Accommodation Officer should be invited to attend meetings of the Buildings Committee, when appropriate.	The Accommodations Officer has not been invited to attend any meeting of the Buildings Committee since the review, although the Buildings Committee did endorse the recommendation and there have been significant issues of import to the Accommodations Office discussed.
That the current strong community involvement through Campus Watch be developed further in the context of expanding student numbers.	QPC endorsed recommendation of PRG and commitment of Unit to fostering on-going contact and regular meetings with local groups and individuals.	All activities are on-going. This activity is presently supported by a single staff member in the office.
That operational manuals be developed as good practice, to allow for the absence of staff members and smooth transition in the event of staff turnover.	QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed action by Unit.	Implemented
That the unit better utilise opportunities to be included in other University publications e.g. Undergraduate CD Rom produced by the Admissions Office.	QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed proposed action by Unit. The QPC also recommended that the Unit should form a link with the Student Recruitment	Implemented. The services provided by the Accommodations Office are included in the CD produced by the Admissions Office. A new Student Services

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	Committee.	brochure is being developed and the AO will also be included in this.
The continued and enhanced use of IT to help improve provision of information on the services and to support student activities.	QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed proposed action by Unit: the setting up of an on-line accommodation service for Irish students in addition to the existing service for overseas students.	Implemented. The Unit has a model in place. However at peak times a full-time staff member is required to operate the service. The Unit is presently investigating ways in which the service could be funded.
That consideration be given to the preparation of proposals for any relevant categories in the next round of HEA Targeted Initiatives.	QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed proposed action by Unit. The QPC asked the Director of the QPU to write to the Registrar regarding this issue.	The HEA Targeted Initiatives Programme has altered its focus somewhat and there is now little opportunity for the Accommodations Office to avail of funding under this programme.
That once the Housing Forum has been established it consider provision of emergency accommodation.	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation	There is now adequate provision of accommodation without the need for reserving specific UCC-based accommodation for this purpose. The Accommodations Office is in contact with a number of landladies willing to take on short-stay clients on a B&B basis until a more stable situation can be found for the student. The Hostel on the Western Road also provides short-term accommodation for overseas students until they can find more permanent accommodation that they can afford. There is now adequate provision of accommodation for all overseas students that wish for it.
That a major review be undertaken to assess whether the overall quality of the student experience and the level of student participation in	QPC recommended that each of the three Units (excluding Castlewhite Apartments) should be approached and their views sought regarding a	A major review is needed. A suggestion was made that the Students Union may be interested in co-operating with such a survey and in

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<p>college activities including societies and Students Union involvement has decreased. That the factors involved in such a decrease, if existing, be considered and necessary actions identified.</p>	<p>review of their section. Proposals should be submitted to the QPC and the QPC would then decide upon the action. The student experience in the University should be on the agenda for the next meeting and this issue should also be discussed with the Quality Officers in other Irish Universities.</p>	<p>helping to promote the survey among the student body.</p>
<p>That the university move towards a more integrated structure for student services.</p> <p>The PRG, while realising the resource implications, recommended the consideration of a single reporting relationship to a Senior Officer whose main responsibility would be student affairs with a view to strengthening links between student services and academic staff by providing significant insights into the context of student learning.</p>	<p>QPC strongly endorsed the recommendation to move towards a more integrated structure for student services.</p> <p>QPC directed the President to engage a consultant to conduct a review of: How UCC provides Accommodation to UCC students in the broader context? All accommodation issues to be included with a particular focus on UCC managed accommodation - both currently existing, planned developments and future possibilities. The consultant should report back to the QPC with proposals for the development of a coherent management structure for the Accommodation Office of UCC and the management of UCC-owned student accommodation.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the work of the consultant will aim to review the reporting relationships, the management and co-ordination of all student support services in UCC with a view to developing an approach for the university towards a more integrated structure.</p>	<p>A consultant was employed and presented a report on the management of student accommodation by UCC.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the consultants' work did not go ahead.</p>