

Castlewhite Apartments

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, VP
- vii) Mr. M. F. Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/VP 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 Castlewhite Apartments

Manager of Unit: Ms. P. Gilheaney

No. of Staff: 5 full-time administrative staff

Mission Statement

“To support and supply a service as an accommodation provider to the University and its students and to create an environment which will promote a community spirit where students reside.”

Functions of Castlewhite Apartments

- To accommodate full time students of UCC
- To liase with internal UCC Departments regarding on campus accommodation for Students
- To liase with outside agency's to assist in securing on campus accommodation for their students.
- Ensuring a working environment in which the health of people is ensured
- On going staff development to improve the functions of the unit

- Competitive prices while maintaining standards to satisfy customers needs in ways others do not, through quality and reliability.
- Build relationships with suppliers and contractors.

Aim's & Objectives

- To provide quality accommodation for full time students of UCC at a reasonable cost
- To ensure good customer service/care
- To ensure we obtain repeat business from our current residents.
- To ensure the staff of Castlewhite are content in their jobs
- To ensure we are fully occupied for the entire academic year.
- To develop a community spirit within the complex which supports the social & academic life of its residents
- To maintain the apartments to a high standard. This is achieved by on-going maintenance and a long-term plan for refurbishment of the apartments.
- Maintenance and promotion of good customer relations with existing and potential customers.
- To ensure proper standards are met in the operating of the student residences.

General Comment on Quality Review

The PRG considered the Self-Assessment Report to be adequate but it would have benefited from wider staff consultation, Castlewhite staff evaluation reports and more extensive input from the users i.e. students. The SWOT Analysis was acceptable but the Benchmarking was rather cursory and essentially anecdotal. The Report did not comment on their Service Standards nor was there any financial information provided. The lack of financial information was a key omission that hampered the review of the unit, given its strong business function.

The PRG confirmed the content of the SWOT and the issues raised were reflected in various meetings. It was noted that some of the cost neutral issues identified had already been implemented. There was a realistic interpretation of their position. Comparisons with similar schemes in other universities were difficult given the relative size of this complex and the absence of financial information. The PRG commended Castlewhite on current discussions to improve the accommodation facilities available to students with disabilities.

The PRG recognised the importance of Castlewhite Apartments as UCC's only onsite campus accommodation. Given the intended expansion of UCC managed accommodation, Castlewhite Apartments staff accepts the need for a move to more formal policies. The PRG acknowledged the good informal relations that Castlewhite Apartments has with its residents. In particular, Castlewhite Apartments make special arrangements on behalf of Irish-speaking students and Non-EU students.

Progress on Implementation of Recommendations for Improvement

Introduction

When Castlewhite Apartments was evaluated there were 278 students beds available in UCC-managed student accommodation facilities in Castlewhite Apartments. There was very significant pressure on these beds and very little need for activities such as marketing of the facilities, etc. other than for summer business. There was some privately-managed student accommodation but not enough to cater for the demand. In the intervening eighteen months the number of student beds in UCC-managed accommodation has been increased to 975 and there has been a parallel increase in the amount of privately managed custom-built accommodation. This has significantly changed the environment in which UCC is providing student accommodation. The name of the company that was set up to manage the UCC Castlewhite accommodation was changed to Campus Accommodation (UCC) Ltd. A new board has been put in place with external members (including Chairperson).

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

VP: Vice-President

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee

EMG: Executive Management Group

SSMG: Student Services Management Group

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of the QPC	Follow-up Report October 2004
That plans should commence immediately as consistent with available resources for a programme of rolling refurbishment and upgrading of the Apartments.	QPC endorsed recommendation. QPC noted that the Secretary & Bursar referred to plans being drawn up for the refurbishment of Castlewhite Apartments in his response to the PRG Report. The QPC expressed a wish to see the plans.	A group including representation from the Office of Buildings & Estates has been set up and a plan to refurbish one-third of the student accommodation each year has been put in place. The work will take place during the summer months and a project manager will be employed to manage the refurbishment. Each year there is on-going maintenance and replacement in the apartments. However a total refurbishment of Castlewhite is planned to be completed in 3 years.
That the Unit should conduct a systematic annual survey of residents at an appropriate time.	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation. QPC expressed their strong disappointment at the level of response to the survey conducted. The Committee asked for information on the action to be taken to conduct the survey and expressed the expectation that a better response rate will be achieved.	This has been done using focus groups and it has been agreed that a UCC Campus Accommodation survey will be undertaken every year from now on.
That the Unit should strive for better communication within	QPC endorsed recommendation and	A new web site has been set up. The General Manager of

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the campus.	recommended that the Manager suggest detailed mechanism for implementing same.	the Company is working with the Admissions Office. The company now has more contact with relevant departments than previously, especially with regard to conference and summer business. New information leaflets/brochures were developed.
Recommendations relating to ongoing maintenance and security.	QPC endorsed recommendation. The QPC asked who is responsible for conducting maintenance? Consideration should be given to putting the maintenance job out to tender.	A Facilities Foreperson has been appointed to oversee ongoing maintenance as required. The security operation was always in place and it is the considered view of the Manager that it is adequate for existing purposes – CCTV cameras are installed, a security company is employed to oversee the accommodation, especially at night, wardens live on-site.
That early clarification of developments regarding the expansion of UCC managed accommodation and the role of staff of Castlewhite Apartments be made.	QPC endorsed recommendation.	Implemented.
<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</p>	<p>This has effectively been implemented, although the group which has been set up and meets regularly is not styled as a housing forum as such. The group includes the representatives of the Students Union and the Administrative Secretary. Current policy to achieve a substantial increase in UCC owned/managed beds was developed through this group and significant progress has been made, including an increase in the number of beds from 278 to 975.</p>

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	report of the consultant has been received (see later recommendation).	
That the Manager of Castlewhite Apartments be included in the SSMG	QPC did not endorse this recommendation. Any actions to be taken should await the report from the consultant (see later recommendation).	There has been no action as yet on this. The unit would be happy to have the General Manager be a member of SSMG.
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 response and proposed action by Unit.	Implemented. Every complex has its own handbook reflecting operational differences. A Student Handbook has been prepared which is very detailed. A Summer Procedures handbook was already in existence and is upgraded each year. All handbooks include relevant policies and maps and all relevant details.
That corporate financial transparency, including management costs, and clarity on the nature of the separate identity of UCC Castlewhite Apartments as a company be put in place.	Any actions to be taken should await the report from the consultant (see later recommendation).	Implemented. See introduction.
That an early review of the current room allocation policy be carried out.	QPC recommended that the Housing Forum, if/when established, is the appropriate place for deciding policy in this area. Any actions to be taken should await the report from the consultant (see later recommendation).	A review will be conducted each year and will include a review to ensure that policies are in line with University policies. With the increase in the number of beds available it is now possible to have a policy and implement it.
That improved communication between Castlewhite Apartments and the Student Centre regarding the service available to students from the 'Castlewhite Shop' be put in place.	Any actions to be taken should await the report from the consultant (see later recommendation).	Work is still on-going to ensure a better service is provided by the Shop. The Shop is the responsibility of the Student Centre and not Campus Accommodation (UCC) Ltd. Some improvements have been made.

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<p>That a major review be undertaken to assess whether the overall quality of the student experience and the level of student participation in 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>QPC recommended that each of the three Units (excluding Castlewhite Apartments) should be approached and their views sought regarding a 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>This issue is now being considered by the Quality Officers Group of CHIU. (This matter is of only indirect relevance to Campus Accommodation (UCC) Ltd.).</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:</p> <p>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</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>

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	a view to developing an approach for the university towards a more integrated structure.	