

**University College Cork**  
**National University of Ireland, Cork**  
**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**  
**Computer Centre**

**Academic Year 2001/2002**

6<sup>th</sup> March 2002

## Members of the Peer Review Group:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
1. Mr. Con O'Brien	Academic Secretary, UCC
2. Mr. John O'Connell	Director, Computer Centre, NUI Maynooth
3. Dr. Richard Studdert	Senior Lecturer, (Computer Science), UCC
4. Mr. Don Wolfe	Consultant, Brown University, USA

## Timetable of the site visit

### Tuesday 12 February 2002

- 18.00 – 19.30 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group in Suite 1, Business Centre, Kingsley Hotel, Victoria Cross, Cork  
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.  
Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.  
Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified.
- 20.00 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

### Wednesday 13 February 2002

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Meeting Room, Computer Centre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kane Building, UCC
- 08.45 – 13.00 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all unit staff, including administrative and technical staff, as appropriate. Time will be allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.  
The following is the schedule for the morning session.
- 08.45 – 09.15 Mr. Martin Hayes, Director of Computer Centre
- 09.15 – 09.45 Co-ordinating Committee:  
Roy Cummins (Chair), Geraldine Buckley, Mark Delahunty, Martin Hayes, Sinead Horgan, John Murphy. (P Sheehan was away and could not attend)
- 09.45 – 10.30 Computer Centre Management Committee  
Jerry Buckley, Peter Flynn, John Murphy, Michael O'Halloran, Henry O'Keefe, Denis O'Sullivan, Martin Hayes (Chair)
- 10.30 – 10.40 Katherine McLaughlin, Senior Executive Assistant

- 10.40 – 11.00 Users of Training services (users attending training sessions on the day will be invited to speak briefly to the Peer Review Group)
- 11.05 – 12.00 Systems & Network Operations staff
- 12.00 – 13.00 Enterprise Applications staff
- 13.00 – 13.45 Systems & Network Engineering staff
- 13.45 – 14.15 Working lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 14.15 – 15.00 Visit to core facilities of Computer Centre accompanied by Martin Hayes and:  
Henry O’Keeffe: Computer room (communications, etc)  
Denis O’Sullivan: laser & radio wavelan equipment  
Michael O’Halloran: Boole Basement & O’Rahilly Building Computer Laboratories
- 15.00 – 15.30 User Services (excluding Helpdesk) staff
- 15.30 – 16.00 Representatives (10) of undergraduate students organised by Cathal O’Suilleabhain, Deputy President (Welfare) SU
- 16.00 – 16.30 Representatives of postgraduate students (4) organised by Cathal O’Suilleabhain, Deputy President (Welfare) SU
- 16.30 – 17.30 Helpdesk staff
- 17.30 – 18.30 Electronic Publishing staff
- 19.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day. Working private dinner for members for the Peer Review Group.

#### **Thursday 14 February 2002**

- 08.30 – 08.45 Convening of Peer Review Group in Meeting Room, Computer Centre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kane Building, UCC
- 08.45 – 09.15 Mr. Ger Harrington, Director, Buildings & Estates
- 09.15 – 09.30 Ms. Rosemarie Scanlon, IT Services, UCC Library
- 09.30 – 10.00 Group of systems administrators/technical support staff  
Mr. John O’Riordan, Senior Technician, Dept. of Physics  
Mr. Bob Dumigan, Systems Administration Manager, AFIS  
Ms. Karen Hannigan, Systems Administrator, AFIS  
Mr. Diarmuid O’Riordan, Computer Systems Administrator, Engineering  
Mr. Stephen Dineen, Senior Technician, Dept. of Physiology
- 10.00 – 10.30 Mr. Noel Keeley, Vice-President & Director of Human Resources

- 10.30 – 11.00 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President and senior member of the Executive Management Group of the University
- 11.00 – 11.30 Group of academic staff users  
 Dr. Alan Collins, Dept. of Food Business & Development  
 Dr. Dave Sheehan, Dept. of Biochemistry  
 Dr. Declan Kennedy, Dept. of Education  
 Dr. Darius Whelan, Dept. of Law
- 11.35 – 12.00 Group of academic support staff users  
 Ms. Adrienne Buckley, Financial Accountant, Finance Office  
 Dr. Hilary Doonan, Systems Administrator. Registrar's office  
 Ms. Mary Frost, Senior Executive Assistant, Dept. of Food Science, Food Technology & Nutrition  
 Ms. Majella O'Sullivan, Administrative Officer, Arts Faculty
- 12.00 – 12.30 Mr. Michael O'Sullivan, Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development
- 12.30 – 13.00 Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar – Vice-President for Administration & Finance
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working Lunch for members of the Peer Review Group  
 Plus tour of facilities
- 14.00 – 14.15 Mr. Tony Perrott, Head, Audio Visual Services Unit
- 14.15 – 14.45 Mr. Martin Hayes, Director of Computer Centre (to clarify any outstanding issues)
- 15.00 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation to all staff of the Computer Centre, made by D. Wolfe, summarised the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.  
 Venue: Computer Centre Training Centre, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Kane Building
- 19.00 Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

## **Friday 15 February 2002**

Externs depart

### **Suitability and Adequacy of the Timetable**

In general, the Peer Review Group (PRG) found the timetable to be suitable and adequate if tightly drawn. The group considered that it would have been helpful to have had a little time at the end of each morning and afternoon for reflection and overview. The group was satisfied that it met with all relevant staff in the Computer Centre and groups of stakeholders. The support and help of the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit is acknowledged.

## **Methodology**

All members of the group participated in the drafting of the Report. Dr. R. Studdert acted as rapporteur and Mr. Don Wolfe made the exit presentation. A first draft of the Report, drawing on the exit presentation, was prepared during the evening of the second day and completed using email communications over the course of the next couple of weeks.

## **Self-Assessment Report**

The PRG Group were impressed with the comprehensive nature of the Self-Assessment Report. They acknowledge 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 PRG noted, however, the relatively low response from staff in the Computer Centre to the staff questionnaire.

It was surprising to find no reference to governance issues in the Self-Assessment Report, which the PRG 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 group felt that a summary of the actions taken would have been preferable to including the minutes of the meetings of the Self-Assessment Committee in the report. They would have had an expectation that the Self-Assessment Report would have contained specific recommendations for improvements requiring no additional resources.

## **Overall Analysis**

The PRG 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.

## **Findings and Recommendations of the Peer Review Group**

**The Peer Review Group makes the following recommendations to university management:**

### **Governance**

There is no university Policy Committee overseeing computing in UCC currently in operation.

*Better governance can be achieved by forming a high-level university committee, whose purpose would be to set priorities, oversee direction and validate needs. The committee should be a committee of Governing Body and should comprise deans of faculties, senior university management and student representation as follows:*

*Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs  
Secretary & Bursar and Vice-President for Administration & Finance  
Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Developmentg  
Librarian  
Director, Buildings & Estates  
Technical Expert from within UCC nominated by the President  
Director of the Computer Centre  
Deans of Faculties (7)  
One undergraduate and one postgraduate student*

*The Chairperson should be appointed by the President.*

*The Committee should publish an Annual Report, following approval by Academic Council and Governing Body.*

### **Resources**

The level of resources available to the Computer Centre is inadequate.

*The Peer Review Group consider the Computer Centre to be under resourced in terms of staff, space and money. The level of funding should be increased on an incremental basis, linked to the achievement of satisfactory performance levels. Space requirements must be met, to adequately use the recommended increases in resources.*

### **University Management**

Awareness among senior management of the needs of the Computer Centre.

*The Group were satisfied from their interviews that senior university management is supportive of providing additional resources to the Computer Centre, where value for money is demonstrated by the Centre in using that investment successfully.*

### **University Physical Planning**

The co-ordination of services is inadequate.

*Senior management needs to take responsibility for co-ordinating services provided by Buildings and Estates, Computer Centre and Audio Visual Services. In particular, networking services need to be advised of building plans, before costings are finalised.*

## **Human Resources**

Unresolved human resources issues are impacting negatively on operating performance.

*Human Resources need to recognise that the Computer Centre has special issues, that need to be resolved without delay, as regards compensation and staff development. In particular, the Computer Centre needs the support of Human Resources in the following areas of staff development:*

- Management Skills
- Supervisory Skills
- User Interface Skills
- Service Quality Control

### **The Peer Review Group make the following recommendations to the Computer Centre:**

The PRG recognises that the work covered is much wider than may be indicated below and is fully defined in the Self-Assessment Report (Appendix A).

#### ***Organisation***

The current organisation is sub optimal in meeting user needs.

*Restructure to optimise performance and plan for additional staff*

#### ***Support for the Director of the Computer Centre***

The present Director has many commitments within and without the University and should have high level support, to ensure that the Centre is regularly meeting agreed service levels. This would allow the Director to pay more attention to strategic issues and to developing linkages with the key stakeholders.

*A Deputy Computer Centre Director should be appointed from amongst the existing unit heads and paid an allowance for same.*

#### ***Profile***

The profile of the Director of the Computer Centre within the university is not commensurate with his responsibilities.

*The Director of the Centre should be an ex officio member of key university committees, as appropriate.*

#### ***Network Infrastructure***

IT network infrastructure is a core function of the Computer Centre. The Systems and Networking Operations Group are unable to devote sufficient resources to staff development, planning and proactive preventative procedures. The Network Projects Office within the Systems and Networking Operations Group is currently understaffed and as a result only reacts to crises and urgent service demands.

*Develop the potential of resources in systems networking, to enable them to meet the service requirements of stakeholders. The LAN Backbone should be treated as an inherent part of the Physical Infrastructure plan of the University.*

### ***Enterprise Applications***

The Group noted that the Student Records System has been successfully implemented and that implementation of a new Human Resources application linked to Payroll is underway.

*The Group believes that the Computer Centre would be able to provide consultancy and project management skills, in the successful implementation of a new system for the Finance Office. There needs to be a Business Resumption Plan for all key administrative functions (both central and distributed) and sufficient resources identified to execute the plans if necessary.*

### ***Electronic Publishing***

The output and value-added of this unit are not clear.

*The role of this group should be reviewed. Pending this review, the resources of the group should be targeted at web-enabling the documentation in the Computer Centre.*

### ***User Support***

Current service levels fall seriously below user expectations.

*Add maturity and skills to the Helpdesk by rotating permanent staff manning the Helpdesk within a unified user support service*

*Requests for assistance that relate to desktop facilities for key University Officers, Academics and service providers should be assigned a priority that reflects the serious impact that disruption of services for these users could have on the University.*

*Open tender procedures must be used to select approved suppliers of Desktop Equipment who are prepared to meet the current service level requirements set by the Computer Centre.*

*Develop and execute a central purchase process of basic desktop equipment to meet current needs.*

*Maintain a small number of machines in stock, commissioned to the standard configuration, to meet small orders from departments*

*Following implementation of a central purchase process and with effect from an agreed date, equipment purchased outside of the Computer Centre, will receive a reduced level of support. Equipment that is purchased from unapproved suppliers will not be supported by the Computer Centre*

*Recruit students with IT skills, at an appropriate rate, to support permanent staff on the Helpdesk and provide relevant service training. Tie student pay levels to the amount of service training they complete*

*Call management and Helpdesk tools should be developed urgently, in support of bringing user services up to acceptable levels*

*Establish and implement appropriate service level agreements with key stakeholders*

*Review existing services with a view to eliminating activities that do not contribute to the stated mission statements of the Computer Centre and the University*

### **Training**

Training is provided by staff on contract at an introductory level on applications such as word processing, spreadsheets and web FrontPage development.

*Staff training in the use of ICT should form part of the staff development process in the University. The Computer Centre should expand the use of CBT training, where appropriate and should consider factoring out specialist courses for advanced users to improve efficiency and to provide busy users with quality documentation..*

*The existing training staff should spend time working as part of User Support and incorporate the related experience gained into the delivery of training.*

### **Student Computing Facilities**

Computing facilities for students vary, depending on whether they have access to dedicated laboratories or to open access pcs.

*Students in departments with dedicated pc laboratories are generally well catered for. The situation for students relying on open access pcs is materially less so. The present number of open access pcs is not sufficient for the university. The Group notes the university's intention to improve matters and progress achieved to date notwithstanding the severe space constraints. Moves underway to provide open access to 50 pcs in the Boole Basement are especially welcome.*

*The Computer Centre should endeavour to increase the effectiveness of the existing stock of open access pcs through ongoing training and closer supervision of the student supervisors who assist users in these facilities. Student supervisors must provide a quality service and maximise the return from the available resources.*

*The printing facilities for students should be improved where possible and a common pricing system should apply.*

*The present provision of public kiosks is welcomed and should be expanded, where possible.*

### **Teaching and Learning**

The Group noted that HEA funding for the use of IT for teaching and learning has been received in co-operation with the Department of Education.

*Educational Technology projects may have major implications for the Network Infrastructure and Server capacity. E-learning software and Licenses costs are a major factor. The Group believes that the Computer Centre would be able to provide consultancy and project management skills in the successful implementation of Educational Technology initiatives.*

*The Computer Centre needs to continue to develop and maintain infrastructure that will take advantage of advancements in existing and emerging educational technology.*

### **Service Levels**

Serious backlogs exist in service delivery and response times to stakeholders are inadequate.

*Service levels should be agreed and published. Where appropriate, temporary outsourcing should be employed to reduce backlogs, consistent with agreed service levels.*

*Staff in the Computer Centre should be encouraged to create an environment where, consistently, the Centre is seen to accept the ownership of all problems presented to them.*

### ***Distributed Support***

There is distributed support in academic departments with heavy computing needs and similarly in some central administrative areas.

*The Computer Centre should take a leadership role in ensuring that Systems Administrators are part of a wider IT community as partners in the leveraging of maximum value from IT investment. As a part of this process, the Computer Centre should host monthly meetings of the Systems Administrators, where current plans and problems are discussed and mini training topics are offered.*

*Where Systems Administrators do not exist in departments the Computer Centre should identify and encourage individuals, who would work with them, in improving service levels in these areas.*

### ***Staffing***

The level of staffing is inadequate to meet existing IT needs.

*Two appointments should be made immediately, in area(s) of most strategic value, in lieu of two vacant posts in Enterprise Applications and Systems & Network Engineering.*

*The university should sanction 2/3 prioritised appointments each year, until such time as core services satisfy university objectives.*

*The number of contract posts should be reviewed urgently, with a view to prioritising permanent appointments to deliver core activities.*

### ***Future IT Needs***

The Group noted expanding academic demands in teaching (Nursing, Pharmacy, Clinical Therapies, Microelectronics) and Research (new Research Centres and new Research Library) and related IT responsibilities.

*Additional resources, over and above resources indicated above to meet current needs, will be required to support these upcoming teaching and research facilities.*

### ***IT Policies***

IT policies across a range of IT issues are required.

*The Group believes that staff in the Computer Centre are empowered to bring forward for implementation IT policies including security to protect the integrity of IT infrastructure and services.*

*Computer Centre staff should research the existing policies of other institutions and develop for adoption a comprehensive suite of information technology policies for UCC.*