

**University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork**

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Academic Year 2002/2003**

Peer Review Group Report

**Student Centre
Áras na Mac Léinn**

7 March 2003

1. Introduction

In February 1990 UCC students voted in a referendum to put in place a levy on student fees to allow for the construction of a Student Centre. The Student Centre (Áras na Mac Léinn) was completed in November 1995 and is a tribute to the vision and commitment of the students of UCC to provide a centre at the hub of campus life.

The Student Centre is centrally located on campus and initially included an information desk, exhibition area, multi-function hall, bar (Club Áras), coffee shop, mini-market shop, travel agents (UCC Travel), stationery and gift shop, pool room, radio studios (Cork Campus Radio 97.4FM) student newspaper offices (University Xpress) and administration offices. Following a recent extension the Centre now has a new coffee shop (Café Oasis) and an Internet café (Café Panamora), full kitchen for Club Áras, a Bank of Ireland branch, a bookstore, a mother and baby room, and offices for the Students Union. In addition the Centre is also responsible for the UCC Crèche currently located off the main campus, and two other shops. A General Manager, who also holds the position of Administrative Officer of the Students Union, manages the centre. The General Manager/ Administrative Officer is an employee of UCC but other staff members are employees of the Student Centre (Áras na Mac Léinn). The Student Centre currently employs approximately 39 full-time staff and 42 part-time staff, many of whom are students.

2. Members of the Peer Review Group:

Professor Charles Daly, Dean, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, UCC

Mr. Bruce Hamilton, Director of Memorial Union and Student Activities,

University of Rhode Island, USA

Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Student Affairs, DCU

Ms. Anne Mills, Admissions Officer, UCC (*Chair*)

3. Methodology

The PRG commenced their three-day site visit on Tuesday 4th February 2003. The PRG acted as a team throughout, and drafted the report collectively. The PRG has been asked to conduct a review of four units:

- Accommodation and Student Activities Office
- Castlewhite Apartments
- Student Centre
- UCC Students Union

Initially it had been intended that a single PRG Report would be completed encompassing all four units. However, in the course of the site visit it became apparent that a single report would be inappropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the employment status of the staff was not consistent across all four units. Secondly, the units do not form a single entity or report to a single person. Thirdly, the units did not have sight of the other three Self-Assessment Reports prior to their submission so it seemed meaningless to provide feedback to a unit on any report other than its own. Therefore the PRG agreed that it would prepare four PRG Reports instead of one.

4. Timetable of the site visit

The final timetable of the site visit is presented in *Appendix 1*. The provisional timetable was altered during the course of the site visit at the request of the Peer Review Group (PRG) to allow for the inclusion of other members of staff. In addition some members of staff requested individual meetings and these were accommodated by the PRG. While the timetable was very full the combination of individual meetings and group meetings worked well. Given the complex nature of the units under review additional time for drafting the PRG Report would have been beneficial.

5. PRG comments on the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report

At the outset the PRG would like to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by the Student Centre in preparing their Self-Assessment Report.

The SWOT analysis was excellent and very comprehensive. The Benchmarking exercise was very thorough. It is noteworthy that the Centre chose to benchmark against well-resourced American universities as well as Irish and UK universities. Completed staff surveys from some staff were included in the report but no results from student surveys were presented.

6. PRG comments on the content of the Self- Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment Report was well prepared and presented a major achievement given the complex nature of the Student Centre and the wide range of services that it provides.

The SWOT analysis was confirmed as accurate during the review and it was noted that some of the issues identified during the SWOT analysis, including the appointment of a commercial manager have already been addressed. It was very valuable to have the implementation schedule for recommendations included in the report. The Benchmarking was impressive and confirmed that the UCC Student Centre compares well with similar centres in other Universities. The Service Standards of the unit were well documented in the report.

A good audit of internal and external users of the service was undertaken. While copies of the questionnaires were included the PRG felt that the report would have been enhanced by the inclusion of results from the completed student questionnaires.

7. Findings of the Peer Review Group

The PRG found the Student Centre to be a large high quality facility staffed by professionals of high calibre. The PRG was particularly impressed with the manner in which its very committed staff had continued to provide a very good service during the recent building phase of the extension.

In common with other Student Centres, the dynamic of managing a variety of stakeholders (including the Students Union) and the inevitable creative tensions that arise between different needs was evident. The issues raised included the level of Students Union involvement and the availability of information in the

context of the need to provide a high quality commercial service. The PRG welcomed the Student Centre commitment to improve dialogue with the Students Union to clarify issues with regard to the Student Centre. In particular, the need for frank, realistic and fair discussions on space for the Students Union emerged as critical during the site visit.

At present the Student Centre compares favourably with units carrying out similar functions in other institutions. The Student Centre significantly contributes to the University mission of improving the quality of the student experience with many of the services in the Student Centre providing opportunities for student development.

8. PRG comments on recommendations in the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG was extremely impressed with the comprehensive nature of the recommendations for improvement made by the Student Centre. In particular the PRG noted that many of the recommendations have already been implemented and a timetable of completion has been developed (see below). The PRG endorsed all of the following recommendations contained in the Self-Assessment Report but does so in the context of issues raised in Section 9: Additional Recommendations of the PRG. The PRG especially endorses the concept of a professionally run high quality Student Centre that will be a focal point for the student body and college community and a place where student development is nurtured.

Recommendations made by the Student Centre

MISSION

1. Formal Review annually to maintain relevance and attention.
Managers Group *May/June 2003*
2. Prepare statements for each department.
General Manager, Dept. Manager & Staff *July 2003*
3. Draft statement for each job (followed by annual review for job-holder).
Dept. Manager & Staff *May 2004*
4. Provide orientation programme for incoming student members (and new College Members) of Advisory Board (July annually) to improve understanding of purpose and process.
General Manager & Deputy General Manager *May 2003*

PROGRAMME

5. Student Development Programme
(Students at Info Desk, CCR, Xpress, Events, Shops, Club Áras)
Assign a manager to co-ordinate and develop a full written programme.
Facility Services Manager *June/July 2003*
6. Media Volunteers application forms to be available on-line.
Deputy General Manager *May 2003*
7. “University Xpress” and “An Scéal ón Áras” to be available on line.
Deputy General Manager *June 2003*

LEADERSHIP

8. Augment the benefits of the weekly communications meetings for Managers through the setting up of a leadership group consisting of the General Manager and the senior person in each of the areas identified in Recommendation 13 i.e.
General Manager
Financial Manager & Deputy General Manager
Events Manager
Facility Services Manager
Commercial Manager
General Manager *December 2002*

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

9. Restructure reporting arrangements for managers and appoint a Commercial Manager to co-ordinate/direct retailing activities including new developments (i.e. kitchen/catering and a re-developed Coffee Shop outlet).
General Manager *January 2003*
10. Managers to have a formal training and team building session including a

forum for receiving ideas from all staff (full-time & student staff) once a quarter.

Commercial Manager (and facilitator if necessary) *July 2003*

11. Team building events for managers to improve quality of weekly communication meetings.

Deputy General Manager *May 2003*

12. Management to review marketing needs and put the necessary staff arrangements in place.

General Manager *June 2003*

13. Re-align management organisation in line with “Best Practice” for Student Centres elsewhere (e.g. generally along lines developed by ACUI) – 4 strands consisting of:

- a. administration, finance & media
- b. programme management
- c. facility and operations
- d. retail/commercial

General Manager *January 2003*

14. Improve work scheduling through more thorough advance written planning.

All Managers *May 2003*

HUMAN RESOURCES

15. Staff get-together every two months.
(e.g. last Friday of month 16.30/18.00 Club Áras)

Events Manager *Mar/May/July
Sept (bar-b-que amphitheatre)*

16. Monthly newsletter for staff.

General Manager *April 2003*

17. Provide staff with ID Badges.

Media Manager *March 2003*

18. Urge ASUA (Association of Student Centres/Students Union Staff in Ireland) to establish a working group to prepare Job Profiles, set education requirements etc for staff in Student Centres in Ireland.

General Manager *February 2003*

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

19. Seek funding/sponsorship for Quality and Benchmarking Group (recommendation 30) to visit other Colleges in Ireland/UK/USA.
Deputy General Manager *Annual target €10,000*
20. Improve cash management/floats.
Deputy General Manager *April 2003*

FACILITIES, TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT

21. Ensure voice-mail availability for all telephone extensions.
Facility Services Manager *March 2003*
22. Establish e-mail accounts for all computer users.
Facility Services Manager *March 2003*
23. Greater utilisation of Computer Centre training courses.
Facility Services Manager *Attendees to 3 courses in 2003*

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

24. Increase training on defamation for Radio & Publications staff and students.
Media Manager *September 2003 onwards*

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, ACCESS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

25. Implement Continuous training and awareness development.
Deputy General Manager *Programme outline prepared August 2003*

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

26. Meeting for all Áras na Mac Léinn managers with Student Affairs Staff (SSMG Managers) – twice yearly.
General Manager *Commence April 2003*
27. Increase Áras na Mac Léinn Mailing List.
Media Manager *February 2003*
28. Get on more UCC Dept mailing lists.
Media Manager *February 2003*

ETHICS

29. Ethical standard code to be produced.
General Manager & Deputy General Manager *June 2003*

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

30. Set up Quality and Benchmarking Group (an on-going activity) consisting of General Manager (chair) and 6 other staff members drawn from different levels of staff of Áras na Mac Léinn with 50% change in

membership each year.

General Manager

May 2003

31. Introduce consistent and timely staff appraisals.

Quality Group (Recommendation 30) to develop strategy

August 2004

CUSTOMER SERVICE

32. Training for better customer service.

Commercial Manager

January 2004

33. Day customer care courses every year for all managers.

Commercial Manager

September 2003

34. Develop customer loyalty initiatives.

Commercial Manager

October 2003

35. Improved signage throughout the building.

Facility Services Manager

March 2003

AN GHAEILGE

Aistriúchán Thíos (*Translation Below*)

36. 50% Gaeilge scaipthe tríd “An Scéal ón Áras”

Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge

Eanáir 2003

50% Irish Language spread interestly throughout “An Scéal ón Áras”

Irish Language Development Officer *January 2003*

37. Gaeilge go suntasach san nuachtlitr (Moladh 16)

Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge

Aibreán 2003

Use of Irish clearly in evidence in monthly staff newsletter

(recommendation 16)

Irish Language Development Officer

April 2003

9. Additional Recommendations of the PRG

In addition to the above comprehensive recommendations, the PRG also makes the following recommendations. These are also included in the PRG Report on the Students Union in the context of its close interaction with the Student Centre and the dual mandate of the General Manager of Student Centre/Administrative Officer of Students Union.

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
<p>Managing the dual mandate of the General Manager/ Administrative Officer Students Union <i>(as raised during the review process)</i></p>	<p>The PRG recognise the importance of further dialogue regarding the dual mandate of the General Manager. In this context the option of using a facilitator might be considered.</p> <p>(a) Should the functions be split in the future it would be important to carefully consider the job specification and the reporting relationships of the Administrative Officer of the Student Union and how that function will relate to the Centre Manager.</p> <p>(b) Should the dual mandate be maintained then issues regarding workload and working relationships should be addressed.</p>	<p>UCC</p>
<p>Role of Student Centre Advisory Board</p>	<p>The PRG endorses the Student Centre Advisory Board as having a policy role rather than an operational role. However, some forum to discuss operational issues of common interest is worthy of consideration.</p>	<p>Student Centre Advisory Board</p>
<p>Proposed Students Union Office Space in Student Centre.</p>	<p>The PRG noted that factors such as confidentiality, out-of-hours access and security are important factors in considering space for the Students Union. The PRG recommends the need for frank, realistic and fair discussions on Students Union Office accommodation to take place and that the issue must be resolved. This may need to be facilitated by a third party.</p> <p>The PRG gave considerable time and thought to this issue, and discussed various options including the Students Union remaining in their present premises (which would entail refurbishment of those premises), but did not feel it was appropriate to make a definite recommendation.</p>	<p>General Manager Student Centre President Students Union</p>

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Wider use of the Multi-function Hall	The PRG, while recognising the need to preserve the quality of the Multi-function Hall, recommends that consideration be given to the wider use of the Hall on a trial basis.	Advisory Board
Communication and information flow on key areas of interaction between the Students Union and the Student Centre	<p>The PRG Group recommends that better communication in key areas of interaction (such as Entertainment, support for Irish, Publications and Advertising) between the Students Union and the Student Centre be developed.</p> <p>With regard to Advertising, the PRG recommends that there be absolute clarity regarding the distinct and separate identities of the Students Union and the Student Centre when either of these entities is dealing with potential advertisers.</p>	<p>General Manager Student Centre</p> <p>President Students Union</p>
Students Union need for Financial Information on SU and all financial information necessary to assist SU in decision-making with respect to their own functions.	The PRG recommends that the Students Union be provided with good and timely information (including financial and pricing policy)	General Manager Student Centre/ Finance Office
Commercial operations	The PRG recommends that a periodic review of the performance of commercial operations be undertaken. Particular attention should be devoted to UCC Travel in the context of its high turnover.	<p>Student Centre Advisory Board</p> <p>EMG</p>
UCC Crèche	The PRG recommends that priority be given to the early development of the proposed enlarged crèche.	EMG
Greater crossover training and support	The PRG recommend that there is greater crossover training and support for Sabbatical Officers (13 month contracts) and for non-sabbatical staff. This should also involve the provision of standard operating procedures manuals and good briefing notes.	President Students Union

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Non-sabbatical posts	The PRG recommends that there would be realistic expectations of holders of non-sabbatical posts and that time management advice made available to students in these posts.	President Students Union
Recognition for Student Leadership	The PRG recommends the development of extra-curricular activity awards to recognise leadership among the student body.	Joint Board
Status of the Student Centre	The PRG Group was unclear about the status of the Student Centre and its legal relationship with UCC and suggests that the advisability of creating a company be considered.	EMG

Recommendations with wider UCC implications

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Quality of the Student Experience	<p>A constant theme that emerged during the review was the need to address the quality of the student experience. The types of factors that were considered to negatively impact on the current student experience included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high level of teaching • The level of examining (both formal and continuous assessment) • The restructuring of the teaching periods <p>Particular concerns were raised in relation to the impact of modularisation on the first year student experience. These changes are perceived to have reduced the level of student participation in college activities including societies and Students Union involvement.</p> <p>The PRG recommends a major review to assess whether this is in fact the case and to identify actions needed.</p>	Joint Board Deans SNCDC Chaplaincy

Recommendation	Comment from PRG	Action
Integration of Student Services	<p data-bbox="608 253 1171 689">During meetings with stakeholders the desirability of moving towards a more integrated structure for student services was mentioned on many occasions. The need for communication, role clarification, more formalised operating procedures and access to information as the scale of operations is increasing was recognised. In this context the units valued the Student Services Management Group (SSMG) as a resource for sharing information and providing support.</p> <p data-bbox="608 730 1171 1055">The PRG, while realising the resource implications, recommends 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>	EMG

The PRG would like to thank the staff of the Student Centre for their excellent work in preparing for this review, and for their participation during the site visit. The final report of the PRG is based on the recommendations in the Self-Assessment Report, discussions with staff and users of the service and guidelines provided by the Quality Promotion Unit.

The PRG would like to offer their special thanks to Dr. Norma Ryan, Ms. Helen Buckley and Ms. Aoife Ní Néill of the Quality Promotion Unit for their support and hospitality during the site visit.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Group Visit

Accommodations Office & Student Activities Castlewhite Apartments Student Centre Students' Union

Tuesday 04 February 2003

- 12.30 – 14.00 Informal lunch for members of Peer Review Group in Staff Dining Room, UCC, hosted by Dr. N. Ryan
- 14.00 – 16.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
Group agreed final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.
Views were exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored were identified.
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 16.00 – 18.00 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs
- Meetings with Heads of Units*
- 16.00 Pauline Gilheany, Manager, Castlewhite Apartments
16.30 Donnchadh O hAodha, General Manager, Student Centre
17.00 Maura O'Neill, Head, Accommodation Office
17.30 Tommy Reidy, President of Students Union
- 20.00 – 22.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, and Heads of Units
(Pauline Gilheany, Donnchadh O hAodha, Maura O'Neill, Tommy Reidy)

Wednesday 05 February 2003

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 09.00 – 12.30 Continuation of consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all unit staff, including administrative and technical staff, as appropriate. Time was allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.
- 09.00 *Staff of Castlewhite Apartments*
Helen McGrath
Anne Sheehan
- 09.45 *Staff of Accommodation Office*

Eileen Brady, Executive Assistant (job share)
Denis McDonald, Assistant Accommodation Officer
Grainne Murphy, Student help
Susan Shanahan, Senior Executive Assistant (job share)

10.30 Coffee

11.00 *Sabbatical Officers and staff of Students Union*

Fidelma Burnell, Secretary
Lorraine Clifford, Irish Officer, SU
Michelle Healy, Projects Officer, SU
Avril Mulcahy, Entertainment Officer, SU
Caoimh Ni hAnnrachain, Publications Officer, SU
Bernadette O'Sullivan, Postgraduates Officer, SU
JP Quinn, President, Societies Guild
Tommy Reidy, President, Students Union
Esther Walsh, Chair, Class Council

Individual meetings were held with

Lorraine Clifford, Irish Officer, SU
Caoimh Ni hAnnrachain, Publications Officer, SU
Avril Mulcahy, Entertainment Officer, SU

11.45 *Staff of Student Centre*

Terrie Burke, Commercial Manager
Liz Carroll, Facility Service Manager
Georgina Cronin, Deputy General Manager
Finola Crowley, Payroll Administrator
Conor Enright, Student Bar Staff
Orla Fitzgerald, Travel Office Supervisor
Shirley Ismail, Administrative Assistant
Nuala McCarthy, Coffee Shop Supervisor
Rob Kelly, Student Manager
Fiona Meaney, Shops Supervisor
Denise O'Keeffe, Shops Manager
Selena O'Keeffe, Student Manager

12.30 – 13.30 Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group

13.30 – 14.45 Visit to core facilities of Units:

PRG were shown around Student Centre by Donnchadh O'hAodha.
Anne Mills brought the group from Student Centre to Students Union
Offices and Accommodations Office on College Road and then to
Castlewhite Apartments

Staff of Student Centre

14.45 Vincent O'Brien, Student Centre

14.55 Grainne Thompson, Student Centre

15.00 – 17.00 Meeting with representative selections of staff and users of the services

provided by the units concerned, including students and staff of UCC

15.00 Kieran Dowd, Head, Physical Education & Sport
Seamus McEvoy, Head, Careers Service
Mary O'Grady, Head, Disability Office

15.30 Dr. Catherine O'Riordan, Head, Student Health & Counselling
Fr. Michael Regan, Chaplaincy

16.00 *Meeting with representatives of students*
Melanie Dunphy
Eamonn Harrington
Donal Holohan
Eugene Murphy
Deirdre O'Sullivan
Benjamin Thomson

16.30 *Meeting with representative selection of staff*
Dr. Bettie Higgs, Department of Geology
Dr. Edel Barnes, Department of Accounting, Finance &
Information Systems

17.00 – 18.30 Reception in Staff Common Room with:

Ex-sabbatical Officers of the Students Union
John Coughlan, ex-Publications Officer, SU
Paul Kearney, ex-President of Students Union
Phil O'Callaghan, ex-Welfare Officer, SU
Andrew O'Leary, Athletics Union
Maura Lyons, Entertainments Officer 2001/02

Members of Students Guild
Paddy Clifford
JP Quinn, Society's Guild/ Student Societies
Tommy Reidy
Richard Whelan

Representatives of Apartment complexes
Josephine Corbette, Leaside Apartments, Bachelors Quay, Cork
Miriam Ryan, Brookfield, College Road

Former staff of the Student Centre:
Ger Barry, Former Shops Manager
Mike Geary, former Student Manager

Nominated by Castlewhite Apartments
Denis MacDonald, Accommodations Office
Pol Ruiseal, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha

Fr. Michael Regan, Chaplain

19.30 – 23.45 Working dinner for members for the Peer Review Group

Thursday 06 February 2003

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group
Venue: Múscraí Room, Student Centre
- 09.00 – 09.30 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President and member of Executive Management Group
- 09.30 – 10.00 Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/Vice-President for Finance & Administration
- 10.00 – 10.30 Dr. Colm O'Sullivan, Chair, Students Needs & Curriculum Development Committee (SNCDC)
- 10.30 – 10.45 Coffee
- 10.45 – 11.15 Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- 11.15 – 11.30 Dr. John Tyrell, member of Joint Board
- 11.30 – 13.15 Meetings with Heads of units to clarify any remaining issues
- 11.30 Pauline Gilheany, Manager, Castlewhite Apartments
 - 11.45 Donnchadh O hAodha, General Manager, Student Centre
 - 12.15 Maura O'Neill, Head, Accommodation Office
 - 12.45 Tommy Reidy, President of Students Union
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group, with Mr. Michael Farrell, Administrative Secretary
- 14.00 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Units by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. (Note: this presentation was not for discussion by the members of the units)
Venue: Beara Room, Student Centre
- 19.00 – 00.30 Working 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 07 February 2003

Externs departed