



**University College Dublin**

**Periodic Quality Review**

**UCD Registry**

**March 2013**

**Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 15 October 2013**

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## **1. Introduction and Overview of UCD Registry**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of UCD Registry, at University College Dublin (UCD), which was undertaken in March 2013. By international standards, the Review Group considered the unit to be a well-run, agile and efficient unit and the commendations and recommendations contained within this report should be considered in that context.

### **The Review Process**

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997, and international good practice (e.g. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2007). Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.
- 1.3 The purpose of periodic review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this essentially developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:
- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning opportunities.
  - To monitor research activity, including: management of research activity; assessing the research performance with regard to: research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
  - To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
  - To provide a framework within which the unit can continue to work in the future towards quality improvement.
  - To identify shortfalls in resources and provide an externally validated case for change and/or increased resources.
  - To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice.
  - To identify challenges and address these.
  - To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality review procedures also enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for

assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997.

1.4 Typically, the review model comprises four major elements:

- Preparation of a Self-assessment Report (SAR)
- A visit by a Review Group (RG) that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period
- Preparation of a Review Group Report that is made public
- Agreement of an Action Plan for Improvement (Quality Improvement Plan) based on the RG Report's recommendations; the University will also monitor progress against the Improvement Plan

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: [www.ucd.ie/quality](http://www.ucd.ie/quality).

1.5 The composition of the Review Group for UCD Registry was as follows:

- Professor Joe Carthy, UCD College of Science Principal and Dean of Science (Chair)
- Ms Marie Burke, UCD Associate Librarian (Deputy Chair)
- Mrs Janet Rennie, Director of Academic and Student Administration, College of Humanities and Social Science, University of Edinburgh
- Dr Paul Greatrix, Registrar, University of Nottingham
- Dr Jeffrey von Munkwitz-Smith, Assistant Vice President and University Registrar, Boston University

1.6 The Review Group visited UCD Registry from 4-8 March 2013 and held meetings with UCD Registry staff on an individual or group basis, representative students and staff from across the University. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 2.

1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation, provided in hard copy and online by UCD Registry during the Site Visit.

### **Preparation of the Self-assessment Report**

1.8 UCD Registry established a Self-assessment Co-ordinating Committee in March 2012 in accordance with the UCD Quality Office Guidelines. The members of the Co-ordinating Committee were representative of UCD Registry staff across the various section areas and categories. The members of the Co-ordinating Committee were:

- Kevin Griffin, Director of Registry (Chair)
- Christina Burke, Programme School Liaison, Administrative Services
- Karina Daly, Deputy Director of Assessment

- Lynn Foster, Senior Policy Officer, Academic Secretariat
- Martin Hurley, Online Applications Administrator, Admissions
- Ciara McCabe, Assistant to the Director of Registry
- Mark Monaghan, Online Marketing Executive, Student Recruitment
- Marie O’Flanagan, Communications Officer, Office of the Director of Registry
- Ciarán Ó hUltacháin, Assessment Policy Officer, Assessment
- Michael Sinnott, Director of Administrative Services

- 1.9 The Co-ordinating Committee (SARCC) met regularly during the preparation of the SAR. A project plan was outlined for staff with clear tasks and timelines. The SARCC and three sub-groups (editorial, communications and data collection) monitored progress against the project plan. All staff had a number of opportunities to contribute to the report preparation through attendance at SARCC meetings, input and feedback through workshops, updates provided at Registry staff and team meetings. The draft SAR was circulated to all members of Registry staff and the feedback gathered was incorporated in the final draft of the SAR.

### **The University**

- 1.10 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origin dates back to 1854. The University is situated on a large, modern campus, about 4km to the south of the centre of Dublin.

- 1.11 The University Strategic Plan (to 2014) states that the University’s Mission is:

“to advance knowledge, to pursue truth and to foster learning, in an atmosphere of discovery, creativity, innovation and excellence, drawing out the best in each student, and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland in the wider world”.

The University is organised into 38 Schools in seven Colleges;

- UCD College of Arts and Celtic Studies
- UCD College of Human Sciences
- UCD College of Science
- UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
- UCD College of Health Sciences
- UCD College of Business and Law
- UCD College of Agriculture, Food Science and Veterinary Medicine

- 1.12 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary, Arts, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 24,000 students (15,400 undergraduates, 6,900 postgraduates and 1,900 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on University programmes, including over 5,000 international students from more than 120 countries.

## **UCD Registry**

- 1.13 UCD Registry is one of nine support units reporting to the Registrar, Deputy President and Vice-President for Academic Affairs.
- 1.14 The offices of UCD Registry are mainly located in the Tierney Building, with Student Recruitment located in Roebuck Castle.
- 1.15 UCD Registry has a staff complement of 89 with a FTE of 83.67.
- 1.16 The services of UCD Registry are clustered into the Office of the Director of Registry and five internal units: Academic Secretariat, Student Recruitment, Admissions, Administrative Services, and Assessment.
- 1.17 UCD underwent a significant period of institutional change in 2005 with a revision of its structures and the introduction of modularisation.
- 1.18 UCD Registry delivers a broad range of student and academic administrative services and fulfils a number of academic governance and statutory functions on behalf of the Registrar. Its' organisational structure which was established in 2007 allows for the provision of an integrated service supporting academic structures and a modularised curriculum.
- 1.19 In 2008 the activities of Fees and Grants, and Business Support team were integrated into UCD Registry.
- 1.20 UCD offers awards at NFQ levels 7-10. In 2012 a total of 413 active programmes, 1,963 majors and 6,968 modules were available within UCD's curriculum. Students were registered to 286 programmes, 1,060 majors and 4,531 modules reflecting no intake into the programme, exit routes and other programmes/majors which have been approved but not run.
- 1.21 Total Student registration for 2012/13 is 24,742; 15,545 at undergraduate level, 7,057 at postgraduate level, and others 2,140.
- 1.22 The number of UCD staff has reduced by 8% during the period 2008-12 with a corresponding increase in student intake.

## **2. Review Methodology**

- 2.1 This review covered a broad range of functions and activities provided by UCD Registry. A series of meetings provided the Review Group with an opportunity to address issues raised from their reading of the Self-assessment Report and its supplementary volume. Key stakeholders, including staff from within the Unit and wider University, and students met

with the Review Group. All members of the Group participated in all discussions and meetings. The Report has been read and approved by all members of the Group.

- 2.2 At the exit presentation the Review Group provided an overview of the initial comments.
- 2.3 The Self-assessment Report provided a narrative insight into the workings of UCD Registry and the extent and variety of its activities and responsibilities. A set of appendices was provided as a supplement, along with additional paper and online information which was made available in the room dedicated to this review.
- 2.4 The Review Group met highly experienced and dedicated staff from each of the five sections of UCD Registry. These meetings proved extremely useful and the Review Group were impressed with the professionalism, commitment and honesty demonstrated by all staff.
- 2.5 A clear overview of the methodology undertaken in writing the SAR was presented to the Review Group. Stakeholder feedback was presented in a very clear and concise manner.
- 2.6 The Review Group met student representatives from most of the colleges. The students were in the main very positive in their comments in particular noting the use of social media.
- 2.7 The Review Group noted the current fiscal climate and diminishing resources both financial and human resources in parallel with increasing student numbers.
- 2.8 The Review Group particularly commend the standard and presentation of the Self-Assessment Report and accompanying documentation. It was extremely comprehensive and gave the group an excellent account of the work undertaken by the unit.

### **3. Planning, Organisation and Management**

#### **Registry mission and strategic planning**

- 3.1 Registry has a clear sense of its mission and is very focused on the ways in which its core functions support delivery of the University's strategic plan. The unit has a good planning process with annual work programmes covering core activities of the department and its support for UCD strategic plan implementation.
- 3.2 Communications within Registry seem effective and range from the formal committees and working groups, through to more informal email updates and coffee mornings. The role of the Communications Manager clearly assists with this and the staff feedback shows a generally good level of satisfaction with internal communications.
- 3.3 The work programme is extensive and comprehensive, but is perhaps overly ambitious and appears that it therefore might end up as a constraint rather than an enabler. Many of the

tasks in the work programme are determined by bodies outside the unit or institution and thus prioritisation of activities looks to be a challenge.

- 3.4 Related to this Registry staff are members of, or play key supporting roles for, a large number of UCD committees and working groups which may further limit capacity for work plan and project delivery. This may also lead to a sense of disempowerment with Registry staff feeling limited in their capacity for action and limiting opportunities for innovation. There does have to be appropriate governance and accountability to ensure staff focus on institutional priorities rather than those whose champions shout loudest.
- 3.5 Whilst part of this re-prioritisation may include suggestions for devolution of certain activities to Colleges or Schools this has to be done sensitively as there may be resistance to further devolution as there is a feeling that Schools have already absorbed work passed out from the centre.
- 3.6 There is a sense in the SAR that Registry is slightly concerned about consultation and feels obliged to engage a wide cross-section of the campus community before progressing new ideas. Consultation is important but can be undertaken in a variety of ways and does not need to be over-elaborate or add to the already large number of committees. The Review Group suggest that a review of the number and purpose of committees would be timely.
- 3.7 Registry staffing looks very lean in certain areas, especially Student Recruitment. This is particularly important in relation to the University's strategy to grow Graduate and International student recruitment. There are staff in Colleges and Schools as well as in other central teams including the International Office who have recruitment and admissions roles. It seems inevitable that the University will have to grow staffing in this area if this strategy is to be realised.
- 3.8 In order to ensure greater impact from the combined central and distributed staffing it is suggested that consideration be given to the implementation of a 'hub and spoke' model. This would entail a greater degree of central direction over locally based staff (who would remain locally based). Whilst the Student Recruitment Network seems intended, at least in part, to address this need it is suggested that a hub and spoke arrangement, perhaps operated as a pilot in the student recruitment area could deliver real benefits. It may also help to progress delivery of the Graduate student recruitment agenda.
- 3.9 One related observation is that the Review Group heard enough about the Graduate Strategy Review to cause concerns that it may not be progressing as the University intended. If UCD is to arrive at strategy and meet its ambitions then it is suggested that there may be a need to review progress in this area which does appear to be somewhat disjointed and slow. Eight sub-committees under the main committee seem excessive.

## **Commendation**

- 3.10 Registry has a very clear sense of its mission and its commitment to supporting the University's strategic agenda.

## **Recommendations**

- 3.11 Consideration should be given as to how effectively to prioritise the work plan with a view to eliminating or deferring low priority activities. This should empower Registry staff to consult rapidly with relevant parties and then act both to ensure effective delivery of the work plan and to support new strategic opportunities. In pursuing this course thought will also have to be given to appropriate oversight of such prioritisation via RMT and RSMT.
- 3.12 Consideration should be given to piloting a hub and spoke arrangement perhaps in student recruitment which may also help to progress delivery of the Graduate recruitment agenda.
- 3.13 The level of consultation around new projects/developments whilst important should be appropriate and not necessarily committee based.
- 3.14 Consideration should be given to a review of the number and purpose of existing committees with a view to terminating those whose remit is no longer relevant.
- 3.15 The University should review progress of its Graduate Recruitment strategy.

## **4. Functions, Activities and Processes**

- 4.1 Registry is a large, complex division with several units and an extensive remit. It was acknowledged by all that Registry was seen as having gone from strength to strength in recent years continually working to streamline and refine processes. The Director of Registry was viewed as being proactive and highly committed, in common with his team.

### **Academic Secretariat**

- 4.2 The remit and reporting line of the Academic Secretariat is unclear to some stakeholders. The unit's workload appears ever increasing no doubt related to University initiatives, including the partnership in Beijing. With direction coming from both the Registrar and the Director of Registry there can be confusion. As the Director of Registry reports to the Registrar, perhaps the Registrar should work through the Director of Registry to make assignments to the Academic Secretariat.

## **Commendation**

- 4.3 The capacity of the Academic Secretariat to take on new projects while sustaining a very heavy routine workload is commendable.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.4 Clarification of the reporting line of the Academic Secretariat to more clearly integrate that unit into the Registry Division should be considered. Changing the name of the unit to one that is more descriptive of its function also might be considered.
- 4.5 The use of electronic voting for the Election of Graduates to the Governing Authority ought to be pursued. Given statutory requirement this has to be done but a modest investment in electronic voting will deliver longer term savings.
- 4.6 A review of the number of academic policies, their clarity and simplicity should be conducted. The aim should be to make all enforceable and all in the majority of cases capable of being applied without the need for reference to or reassurance from Registry. This would be of benefit to both Schools and Registry.

## **Student Recruitment**

- 4.7 For such a small team this team has been extremely successful in managing its remit. Student recruitment activity is commendable. The benchmarking activity and examination of operations at other institutions has been extremely beneficial. The student ambassador programme is a particularly outstanding feature of this team's work.
- 4.8 Graduate Recruitment  
The importance of improved graduate recruitment to UCD is not in doubt. Whilst Registry has traditionally always supported undergraduate recruitment and on-course students, the move to cover graduate students was new. The Review Group heard of current recruitment work organized on an ad hoc basis in most Schools, with some able to employ their own marketing and communications staff to facilitate this and to fund recruitment trips abroad for academic staff. It was acknowledged that the work was so critical, it had to be managed strategically and effectively, and strong leadership was required.
- 4.9 The Registry's Recruitment team had been told that graduate recruitment was to be added to their brief, with no increase in staff resources. This team has been extremely successful in managing undergraduate recruitment and increasing numbers annually, so that it no doubt made sense to give the new work to a team with such a strong track record. However, without extra resources, there is a danger that undergraduate recruitment could suffer and graduate recruitment fail to meet expectations.

## **Commendation**

- 4.10 The student recruitment activity undertaken by a very small staff group, within limited resources is exemplary.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.11 There should be an urgent review of the Graduate Admissions Working Group, its eight sub groups and their ability to deliver developments and change in graduate recruitment.
- 4.12 Consideration should be given, despite the constrained financial climate, to appointing more staff to the Recruitment team to enable them to lead and coordinate graduate recruitment work throughout the Colleges and Schools, and with the International Office.

## **Admissions**

- 4.13 Stakeholder feedback indicated that the online application system was considered barely fit for purpose. Whilst the Review Group acknowledges that Registry have made significant improvements to the system in recent years, there is still a gap between what stakeholders expect and what the system can currently deliver. This may be related to a lack of awareness of the systems capabilities amongst some stakeholders; nevertheless the Review Group would suggest that further improvements are necessary to enhance the user experience.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.14 Consideration at the most senior level should be given to allocating appropriate resources which would allow for further improvements to the IT System for Graduate Applications.

## **Assessment and Grading**

- 4.15 The assessment regime and grading process were often cited as examples of frequent contact with Registry. The current situation pertaining to grade changes appeared to be a cause of major frustration to academic and registry staff. The Review Group recommends that the processes and issues around grade changes be examined with a view to creating a more effective system for grade changes.

## **Commendation**

- 4.16 The Examinations operation – the delivery of all exams in one location over a two week period represents an extremely well-organised and rigorous activity.

## **Recommendation**

- 4.17 Consideration should be given to conducting a business process review (perhaps the LEAN model) on the assessment processes relating to the relatively new modular structure, when the review of modularisation next occurs. A professional consultant should lead this process. This should yield benefits through streamlining the work, reducing the number of errors reported, and giving students more confidence in the provisional exam marks they receive.

- 4.18 The Review Group recommends that the processes and issues around grade changes be examined with a view to creating a more effective system for grade changes.

### **Administrative Services**

#### **Curriculum**

- 4.19 The Review Group was impressed by the diversity of choice offered to undergraduate students and the flexible degree structure which enables either depth or breadth of study options to be selected. It learnt from the Registry Factbook that approximately 25% of programmes, 50% of majors and 30% of modules are not taken in any year. This appeared to represent a big overhead for the Registry, in maintaining considerably more open options than was necessary.
- 4.20 The Review Group heard many comments on the benefits of the streamlining of systems and services in recent years. It also heard from College and School staff their views of the difficulty of updating learning outcomes and assessment models in an approved curriculum, and of the deadlines for curriculum development. All thought that these deadlines were too early in the academic year, and were driven either for the convenience of Registry's committees, or by the print deadlines for the prospectus. They were of the view that liaison with them could produce new dates suitable to all areas of the university, and that in the interests of being able to seize market opportunities for recruitment, it must be possible for new programmes to be created and marketed in their first year online/through social media, and not necessarily through the prospectus.

#### **Recommendations**

- 4.21 A review of the current programmes, majors and curricula should be undertaken, with a view to removing all that are redundant, so that the student system is simpler and clearer, and there is no longer an unseen overhead caused by maintaining all these entries.
- 4.22 The Registry, College and School staff should review the timetable for curriculum development, with a view both to aligning deadlines with the capability of all to deliver work, and to enabling the creation of new programmes far faster and at later times in the academic year.

### **Fees and fee setting**

- 4.23 The process for setting of fees was seen as unduly rigid, and not as agile as is needed by a University which needs to respond quickly to opportunities to recruit graduate and international students. Openness and clarity were requested. The Review Group heard a cluster of comments on the need for flexibility on fee setting in terms of supporting School diversity of need or of opportunity to recruit. For example, the needs of Nursing, Business and English schools varied considerably. The Fees Committee which meets ten times a year

to look at all new fees and fee collection problems was seen as evidence of a very system-driven process which introduces delay in responding to their needs.

### **Recommendation**

- 4.24 Consideration should be given to creating agile and clear fees processes to assist UCD face new recruitment and economic challenges in a more responsive timeline. The system should address both standard and non-standard fee requirements, with the latter expected to grow significantly in the future, especially as competition for international, online and part-time recruitment increases.

### **Student Desk**

- 4.25 The hours of the Student Desk have been reduced to give the staff in that team time to respond to the high volume of email messages and telephone calls they receive. At times the Student Desk experiences long queues, though these have been reduced through the expansion of online service capabilities. Training more Registry staff to perform basic Student Desk functions and scheduling staff from other teams to help at high demand and critical time periods would aid in resolving these issues.

### **Commendations**

- 4.26 The Student Desk – despite staff and environment constraints - are clearly committed staff and do a terrific job in supporting students.
- 4.27 Creation of online information and self-service systems to help address necessary cuts in all Registry teams, and the opening hours of Student Desk.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.28 Cross training teams with complementary work-load peaks and troughs would reduce the impact of peaks experience by certain units.
- 4.29 Staff on the Student Desk team should receive ongoing training on the functions -- fees and grants, for example -- that would allow them to provide a greater level of assistance to students without having to contact experts from the other units.

### **Space**

- 4.30 The space for the majority of Registry staff in the Tierney building was not considered to be a good reflection of the quality of Registry services and of the institution. The building is barely sufficient for the numbers of staff, and not indicative of the importance that a University with UCD's aims to rival the best international universities and to consolidate and enhance the UCD student experience, should attach to a student's first impressions.

- 4.31 Arguments made by some Registry staff, in favour of the current space arrangements, focussed on the advantages of co-location of units in order to assist collaborative working. Yet even in the current layout, teams are not all co-located (e.g. Fees and Grants): this could apparently be fixed but would need a willingness to move by some colleagues and possibly the relocation of some whose role is not core to Registry. A number of staff spoke of the benefits of co-locating the Recruitment team with the rest of Registry.
- 4.32 The majority of comments on the staff area were about the noisy and distracting environment for the Registry teams; the difficulty experienced by staff visitors trying to find a person in such a crowded environment; the lack of natural daylight and how cold it is to work in the open plan area (often coats and scarves are needed); the lack of any social or coffee space for informal mingling; and the poor quality of restrooms (for staff and also students/visitors). Many recommended that a better meeting room was needed.
- 4.33 Comments on the Student Desk were unanimously in favour of major refurbishment or even re-location. The Review Group heard that it is not a good building to create a welcome environment for students or present a good first impression; that to students queuing, the presence of Registry staff nearby who are not helping them/reducing the length of queues does not create a favourable impression (with this reinforcing an impression of Registry as a large and not necessarily friendly bureaucracy); that private student meeting spaces are required, and that the opening hours are inadequate.
- 4.34 The positive suggestions were many and not all require major developments to be implemented. For example, there should be a separate section for graduates, who do not like queuing with undergraduates (a type of fast track area); there should be armchairs and cushions, perhaps also plants in the student waiting area; there should be an attempt to create an environment as good as that for international students in the Global Lounge building with some cheerful paint and carpets.
- 4.35 The Review Group discussed proposals for relocating the Student Desk to create an environment that would show that all students are equally valued. There were also strong arguments made for a truly efficient one-stop shop for students where all their queries could be handled. Arguments were also made of creating a greater collaborative approach to student queries between UCD Registry and the many School and Programme Offices, where students also already receive advice and support, and could contribute far more to this work. Some common training and granting access to core systems could enable a group of student support staff to provide a service that would create a good sense of community, be a positive recruitment tool and show UCD cares for all its students.

### **Commendation**

- 4.36 Willingness of staff to work in the current cold, noisy environment.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.37 Consideration should be given to how to address the need to upgrade the space available for the five Registry teams to work together in a suitable environment. This should include suitable meeting rooms, private spaces, and rest areas. Co-location of Units including Student Recruitment should be considered.
- 4.38 Consideration should be given, urgently, to upgrading the Student Desk space to create something of which all can be proud.

## **5. Management of Resources**

- 5.1 The Registry budget has declined by roughly 10% since 2008-2009. It is important to note that this decline has occurred at the same time as increasing enrolment and external and University initiatives, such as the partnership with Beijing Technological University, have increased Registry's workload.
- 5.2 Despite budget reductions and expanded service requirements, UCD Registry has introduced many innovations, including Academic Analytics, the use of social media to improve communications with students, myUCD, the development of the Student Desk, and the creation of the highly commended Programme School Liaison positions and has improved services. UCD Registry is seen by stakeholders as very well-managed. As one stakeholder commented, "As a department, it's an exemplar."
- 5.3 It may be that savings could be found through a close review of non-pay expenditures for print publications. A review of the examination process might also yield some savings. Adoption of electronic voting in the election of Graduates to Governing Authority would yield long-term savings.

## **Commendation**

- 5.4 UCD Registry is to be commended for continuing to innovate and improve services at a time of budget restraint. It is a well-managed division, with hard-working and innovative staff. The Management Team's approach to budget reductions is a thoughtful one.
- 5.5 The work on Academic Analytics is outstanding. The outputs are clearly used by many to some benefit but offer much more potential for even wider application. Overall this is an excellent innovation which is leading the way when compared with UK universities.

## **Recommendation**

- 5.6 UCD Registry should review print publications to determine if they are all needed in their present format.

## **Staffing**

- 5.7 Registry units, aside from Administrative Services, are very small. Administrative Services is composed of a number of relatively small teams. At times the groups are stretched quite thin.
- 5.8 UCD Registry is not over-staffed. It is extremely lean, considering its current remit and new expectations which include expanded involvement in graduate recruitment and admissions. The Recruitment unit of UCD Registry strike the Review Group as particularly small for its remit.
- 5.9 A number of Registry staff have been in their positions for many years. Some might welcome temporary secondment to another team within Registry or even in a Programme Office as a way of broadening their experience and developing new skills. Such secondments should be optional for staff.
- 5.10 Registry should consider moving beyond generic job titles based on UCD grading to titles based appropriate for the individual staff roles. This may help clarify Registry staff roles to those outside of Registry.
- 5.11 The Review Group recognises that a number of staff are carrying out duties and responsibilities associated with higher grades than those they currently hold. The Review Group acknowledges that the University is operating under difficult employment constraints but recommends that management explore promotional opportunities and other innovative ways to recognise administrative staff as a priority.

## **Commendation**

- 5.12 Extremely positive feedback was received from all stakeholders on all UCD Registry staff. Registry staff have been described as being highly professional and responsive, unfailingly polite, often acting beyond the call of duty, open and communicative as well as thoroughly adaptable. Individual staff members were described as - "fabulous", - "fantastic", and - "my lifeline".

## **Recommendations**

- 5.13 Consideration should be given at the Unit level to the development of cross-training plans to allow staff to assist other teams at peak times and to assist the Student Desk when there are queues throughout the year.
- 5.14 Management should explore promotional opportunities and other innovative ways to recognise outstanding administrative staff.
- 5.15 Consideration should be made to moving beyond a generic job title based on UCD grading to titles appropriate to roles.

- 5.16 Consideration should also be given to the nomenclature around generic description of Registry roles - e.g. Administration or Support. The use of the term “professional services” is used in some institutions and the Review Group suggested this as an option.
- 5.17 Consideration should be given to increasing the staff complement in the Student Recruitment team.

## **6. User Perspective**

- 6.1 Registry is a large, complex division with several units. Its remit is extensive. One stakeholder expressed that there is a "need to demystify Registry for the rest of UCD". Many stakeholders told the Review Group that it is sometimes hard to know who to contact in Registry about a particular issue. They are quick to point out, however, that Registry staff are always helpful, whomever they contact, and eventually they wind up in the right place. The Programme School Liaisons are seen as invaluable in helping school staff negotiate the Registry organisation. "My lifeline", as one stakeholder called them.
- 6.2 Given the scope of Registry's remit, these concerns are not unusual. Registry is working to clarify its structure. The Programme School Liaisons, conduits to Registry services for programme managers, are one example. The Registry Operational Liaison Group is another, as was the Registry presentation at the Staff Forum. There may be a need to do more training for the programme and school managers. In-person meetings help "put a face with a name". Several stakeholders suggested that a listing of Registry staff, what they do, and their contact information would be extremely helpful.
- 6.3 It was expressed that students don't always know whether to go to the Student Desk or the school programme office for assistance. In many cases either could assist the student, but in some cases -- fees issues or academic questions -- it is clear. It is unlikely that additional direction to students would have a large impact on this problem. Some additional cross-training between Student Desk and school staff might allow both groups to provide basic information.

## **Commendations**

- 6.4 While it may not always be clear to stakeholders who to go to in Registry for assistance, the staff they contact are invariably helpful.
- 6.5 The development of the Programme School Liaison programme was a highly successful initiative.
- 6.6 The Staff Forum is a very good innovation which allows staff from across UCD to explore issues around the provision of administrative information to students and to identify opportunities for future collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

- 6.7 Development of a "Who Does What in Registry" listing with contact information should be considered.
- 6.8 Consideration should be given to providing an integrated central university calendar of key dates on the Registry website.
- 6.9 The creation of additional staff training cross school/programme office/Student Desk would alleviate confusion experienced by students in seeking assistance.

## **Complexity of processes**

- 6.10 In both the SAR and during meetings with stakeholders, there was much emphasis on the complexity of Registry's work. Stakeholders outlined the difficulty of understanding policies, the frustrations caused by a very rigid set of processes around assessment, fee setting fees and curriculum development. A common comment was that the Registry's deadlines were already too early for Schools, and that there was pressure to make them even earlier. These comments were however always accompanied by praise for the Registry staff who do always assist in navigating through demanding processes. There were many comments about the value of Registry staff help in explaining or clarifying policies; in making changes to assessment regimes or learning outcomes, and in solving problems related to setting fees.
- 6.11 The management of the work around supporting and assessing graduate students was also mentioned to the Panel as an area where either processes were a little unclear, or could be simplified. An example was the submission of PhD theses to the Registry; their checking by the Registry, and delays prior to the appointment of externs for the vivas. The Registry explained their role in ensuring the quality standards of these processes by checking the qualifications of the nominated externs for vivas prior to submitting the names to the ACCE. Only once the Committee had approved the names, were the Schools supposed to arrange dates for vivas: this was seen as unduly bureaucratic and lengthy by Schools, who apparently arranged vivas as soon as theses were submitted. The Review Group fully endorsed the need for the quality audit processes to be followed, yet recommends that a swifter system for turning around this work be found.

## **Recommendation**

- 6.12 There should be a review of the processes for submission of PhD theses, with consideration given to the benefits of this work being handled by College Offices rather than Registry. A method for devolving the authority to approve the appointment of extern examiners to a lower level which can operate swiftly and responsively whilst maintaining appropriate quality assurance procedures would be beneficial for Colleges and for students.

- 6.13 UCD Registry should review its policies around deadlines for Schools, as well as reviewing the complexity around its processes and their communication for its stakeholders

#### **Managing communications from Registry**

- 6.14 The Communications Manager role is a distinctive one and clearly valued by staff within and beyond the Unit.
- 6.15 Those with whom the Review Group met all agreed that there had been good progress in the development and refinement of the UCD Registry website. The site was comprehensive but it was not always easy for users to identify who they need to talk to or where to find the right information if they do not know the correct UCD terminology. The Review Group noted that there has been significant shift from face-to-face and paper to more efficient online support for students which has clearly had a beneficial impact and Registry deserves real credit for this.
- 6.16 Staff from around the University appreciated the efforts made to communicate and to flag up and target appropriately key information by email. Registry staff were encouraged to continue the developments here and the emphasis on making guidance comprehensible and appropriate for the target audience.
- 6.17 The students, like the staff, commented on the difficulty of understanding some of the longer and more complex emails (e.g. those that had been circulated explaining the removal of compensation). The students appreciated the improvements made to self-service facilities and the reliability of these. They cited as examples easier access to fee payment and enrolment on elective modules and the myUCD system. They also commented on the new information on the Registry website which they could easily navigate.
- 6.18 The next step for Communication developments was raised by some staff, and whether the lead should be devolved or centralised. It was clear that some communications from schools overlapped with areas of work to which Registry also contributes. A Review could indicate areas of work best done in Schools, with other areas in UCD Registry. Given the increasing sophistication of students and their use of social media, this is an area needing regular monitoring to be sure the methods used are always the most effective and acceptable/popular.

#### **Commendations**

- 6.19 The appointment of a Communications Officer to coordinate and manage communications across the entire Registry was highly commended by the Review Group.
- 6.20 The general move to more efficient online support and information, including via social media, for students, freeing up staff time for other student support activity.

## **Recommendations**

- 6.21 Registry continues to monitor the user experience of the website.
- 6.22 Registry staff continue to work on streamlining and targeting their communications.
- 6.23 Consideration to be given to more use of FAQs on the website for both Staff and Students.
- 6.24 Consideration to be given to an “away day” for Registry Staff providing an opportunity for it to plan for more cross unit working and more coordinated communication and contact with Schools.

## **7. Summary of Commendations and Recommendations**

(Please note that the paragraph references below refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report text)

### **Planning, Organisation and Management**

#### **Registry mission and strategic planning**

##### *Commendation*

- 3.10 Registry has a very clear sense of its mission and its commitment to supporting the University’s strategic agenda.

##### *Recommendations*

- 3.11 Consideration should be given as to how effectively to prioritise the work plan with a view to eliminating or deferring low priority activities. This should empower Registry staff to consult rapidly with relevant parties and then act both to ensure effective delivery of the work plan and to support new strategic opportunities. In pursuing this course thought will also have to be given to appropriate oversight of such prioritisation via RMT and RSMT.
- 3.12 Consideration should be given to piloting a hub and spoke arrangement perhaps in student recruitment which may also help to progress delivery of the Graduate recruitment agenda.
- 3.13 The level of consultation around new projects/developments whilst important should be appropriate and not necessarily committee based.
- 3.14 Consideration should be given to a review of the number and purpose of existing committees with a view to terminating those whose remit is no longer relevant.
- 3.15 The University should review progress of its Graduate Recruitment strategy.

## **Functions, Activities and Processes**

### **Academic Secretariat**

#### *Commendation*

- 4.3 The capacity of the Academic Secretariat to take on new projects while sustaining a very heavy routine workload is commendable.

#### *Recommendations*

- 4.4 Clarification of the reporting line of the Academic Secretariat to more clearly integrate that unit into the Registry Division should be considered. Changing the name of the unit to one that is more descriptive of its function also might be considered.
- 4.5 The use of electronic voting for the Election of Graduates to the Governing Authority ought to be pursued. Given statutory requirement this has to be done but a modest investment in electronic voting will deliver longer term savings.
- 4.6 A review of the number of academic policies, their clarity and simplicity should be conducted. The aim should be to make all enforceable and all in the majority of cases capable of being applied without the need for reference to or reassurance from Registry. This would be of benefit to both Schools and Registry.

### **Student Recruitment**

#### *Commendation*

- 4.10 The student recruitment activity undertaken by a very small staff group, within limited resources is exemplary.

#### *Recommendations*

- 4.11 There should be an urgent review of the Graduate Admissions Working Group, its eight sub groups and their ability to deliver developments and change in graduate recruitment.
- 4.12 Consideration should be given, despite the constrained financial climate, to appointing more staff to the Recruitment team to enable them to lead and coordinate graduate recruitment work throughout the Colleges and Schools, and with the International Office.

## Admissions

### *Recommendations*

- 4.14 Consideration at the most senior level should be given to allocating appropriate resources which would allow for further improvements to the IT System for Graduate Applications.

## Assessment and Grading

### *Commendation*

- 4.16 The Examinations operation – the delivery of all exams in one location over a two week period represents an extremely well-organised and rigorous activity.

### *Recommendation*

- 4.17 Consideration should be given to conducting a business process review (perhaps the LEAN model) on the assessment processes relating to the relatively new modular structure, when the review of modularisation next occurs. A professional consultant should lead this process. This should yield benefits through streamlining the work, reducing the number of errors reported, and giving students more confidence in the provisional exam marks they receive.
- 4.18 The Review Group recommends that the processes and issues around grade changes be examined with a view to creating a more effective system for grade changes.

## Administrative Services

### **Curriculum**

### *Recommendations*

- 4.21 A review of the current programmes, majors and curricula should be undertaken, with a view to removing all that are redundant, so that the student system is simpler and clearer, and there is no longer an unseen overhead caused by maintaining all these entries.
- 4.22 The Registry, College and School staff should review the timetable for curriculum development, with a view both to aligning deadlines with the capability of all to deliver work, and to enabling the creation of new programmes far faster and at later times in the academic year.

## **Fees and fee setting**

### *Recommendation*

- 4.24 Consideration should be given to creating agile and clear fees processes to assist UCD face new recruitment and economic challenges in a more responsive timeline. The system should address both standard and non-standard fee requirements, with the latter expected to grow significantly in the future, especially as competition for international, online and part-time recruitment increases.

### Student Desk

#### *Commendations*

- 4.26 The Student Desk – despite staff and environment constraints - are clearly committed staff and do a terrific job in supporting students.
- 4.27 Creation of online information and self-service systems to help address necessary cuts in all Registry teams, and the opening hours of Student Desk.

#### *Recommendations*

- 4.28 Cross training teams with complementary work-load peaks and troughs would reduce the impact of peaks experience by certain units.
- 4.29 Staff on the Student Desk team should receive ongoing training on the functions -- fees and grants, for example -- that would allow them to provide a greater level of assistance to students without having to contact experts from the other units.

### Space

#### *Commendation*

- 4.36 Willingness of staff to work in the current cold, noisy environment.

#### *Recommendations*

- 4.37 Consideration should be given to how to address the need to upgrade the space available for the five Registry teams to work together in a suitable environment. This should include suitable meeting rooms, private spaces, and rest areas. Co-location of Units including Student Recruitment should be considered.
- 4.38 Consideration should be given, urgently, to upgrading the Student Desk space to create something of which all can be proud.

## **Management of Resources**

### *Commendation*

- 5.4 UCD Registry is to be commended for continuing to innovate and improve services at a time of budget restraint. It is a well-managed division, with hard-working and innovative staff. The Management Team's approach to budget reductions is a thoughtful one.
- 5.5 The work on Academic Analytics is outstanding. The outputs are clearly used by many to some benefit but offer much more potential for even wider application. Overall this is an excellent innovation which is leading the way when compared with UK universities.

### *Recommendation*

- 5.6 UCD Registry should review print publications to determine if they are all needed in their present format.

## **Staffing**

### *Commendation*

- 5.12 Extremely positive feedback was received from all stakeholders on all UCD Registry staff. Registry staff have been described as being highly professional and responsive, unfailingly polite, often acting beyond the call of duty, open and communicative as well as thoroughly adaptable. Individual staff members were described as - "fabulous", - "fantastic", and - "my lifeline".

### *Recommendations*

- 5.13 Consideration should be given at the Unit level to the development of cross-training plans to allow staff to assist other teams at peak times and to assist the Student Desk when there are queues throughout the year.
- 5.14 Management should explore promotional opportunities and other innovative ways to recognise outstanding administrative staff.
- 5.15 Consideration should be made to moving beyond a generic job title based on UCD grading to titles appropriate to roles.
- 5.16 Consideration should also be given to the nomenclature around generic description of Registry roles - e.g. Administration or Support. The use of the term "professional services" is used in some institutions and the Review Group suggested this as an option.

- 5.17 Consideration should be given to increasing the staff complement in the Student Recruitment team.

### **User Perspective**

#### *Commendations*

- 6.4 While it may not always be clear to stakeholders who to go to in Registry for assistance, the staff they contact are invariably helpful.
- 6.5 The development of the Programme School Liaison programme was a highly successful initiative.
- 6.6 The Staff Forum is a very good innovation which allows staff from across UCD to explore issues around the provision of administrative information to students and to identify opportunities for future collaboration.

#### *Recommendations*

- 6.7 Development of a "Who Does What in Registry" listing with contact information should be considered.
- 6.8 Consideration should be given to providing an integrated central university calendar of key dates on the Registry website.
- 6.9 The creation of additional staff training cross school/programme office/Student Desk would alleviate confusion experienced by students in seeking assistance.

### **Complexity of processes**

#### *Recommendation*

- 6.12 There should be a review of the processes for submission of PhD theses, with consideration given to the benefits of this work being handled by College Offices rather than Registry. A method for devolving the authority to approve the appointment of extern examiners to a lower level which can operate swiftly and responsively whilst maintaining appropriate quality assurance procedures would be beneficial for Colleges and for students.
- 6.13 UCD Registry should review its policies around deadlines for Schools, as well as reviewing the complexity around its processes and their communication for its stakeholders

## **Managing communications from Registry**

### *Commendations*

- 6.19 The appointment of a Communications Officer to coordinate and manage communications across the entire Registry was highly commended by the Review Group.
- 6.20 The general move to more efficient online support and information, including via social media, for students, freeing up staff time for other student support activity.

### *Recommendations*

- 6.21 Registry continues to monitor the user experience of the website.
- 6.22 Registry staff continue to work on streamlining and targeting their communications.
- 6.23 Consideration to be given to more use of FAQs on the website for both Staff and Students
- 6.24 Consideration to be given to an “away day” for Registry Staff providing an opportunity for it to plan for more cross unit working and more coordinated communication and contact with Schools.

## **Appendix One: UCD Registry's Response to the Review Group Report**

### **6 September 2013**



**UCD Registry**  
Clárann UCD

UCD Registry places a high value on the Periodic Quality Review process. Enormous effort was put into the preparation of the Self-assessment Report, and all those who contributed, particularly staff in Registry but also all those colleagues and students who provided feedback through workshops and questionnaires, are owed a debt of gratitude.

The Site Visit was a very positive experience and we would wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Review Team in that regard. The Exit Presentation was a particular highlight, during which very many commendations were issued. This was a tremendous morale booster for all the Registry staff present.

We welcome the many commendations in the Review Report and value in particular the recording of the extremely positive feedback from all stakeholders on the professionalism and commitment of all UCD Registry staff.

There are areas in the Report where we would have valued more commentary (e.g. on how we are performing in respect of international norms) and areas where we feel the conclusions reached were not sufficiently validated (e.g. the section dealing with the Online Applications system). We are heartened that there are recommendations which reflect the findings which emerged out of the self-assessment process (e.g. cross training plans, staff exchange and staff rotation).

The Self-assessment Report will provide the frame of reference for the development of the Quality Improvement Plan, together with the Review Report itself.

## Appendix Two:



### UCD Registry Quality Review

Site Visit, 4 – 8 March 2013

#### **Day 1: Monday, 4 March 2013**

##### **Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit – venue off-campus**

17.30-19.00	Review Group and Quality Office <u>only</u> meet at hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days
19.30	Review Group and Director of Quality <u>only</u> - Dinner hosted by Registrar, Deputy President and Vice-President for Academic Affairs

#### **Day 2 : Tuesday, 5 March 2013**

##### **Boardroom 1, Ardmore House**

08.45-09.30	Private meeting of Review Group
09.15-10.00	Review Group meet with Director of Registry
10.00-10.45	Meeting with Self-assessment Report Co-ordinating Committee
10.45-11.00	Coffee Break
11.00-11.55	Review Group meet with Registrar <sup>1</sup>
12.00-12.30	Meeting with Deputy Registrars
12.30-13.30	Working lunch for Review Group
13.30-16.50	Individual meetings with Registry Directors
13.30-14.00:	Director, Academic Secretariat
14.05-14.35:	Director, Administrative Services
14.40-15.10:	Director of Admissions & Enrolment Planning, Admissions
15.15-15.30:	Coffee break
15.35-15.55	Tour of Open Plan, Tierney Building
16.00-16.30:	Director, Student Recruitment
16.35-17.05:	Director, Assessment

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of the Registrar, Deputy President and Vice-President for Academic Affairs is generally referred to as the Registrar in the Irish Higher Education context

17.05–17.40	Tour of Student Recruitment Offices, Roebuck Castle
17.00	Review Group departs

**Day 3: Wednesday, 6 March 2013**  
**Boardroom 1, Ardmore House**

08.30-09.00	Private meeting of Review Group
09.00-09.55	Meeting with Academic Group 1: Deans/Heads of School/Teaching and Learning
10.05-11.00	Meeting with Academic Group 2: Lecturers/Module Coordinators
11.00-11.30	Coffee Break
11.30-12.30	Meeting with Group 3: Academic Administrators/Managers
12.35-12.50	Meeting with HR Partner, Academic Affairs
12.45-13.45	Working lunch for Review Group with Group 4: Student Group (Including SU sabbatical officers, student ambassadors, class reps, graduates)
13.45-14.00	Break
14.00-14.55	Meeting with Group 5: Central Support Units
15.05-15.45	Meeting with Group 6: Senior Managers Group
15.45-16.00	Break
16.00-17.30	Meeting with individual/small groups of Registry staff (by request to the UCD Quality Office)
17.30-18.00	Review Group meeting to review findings to date
18.00	Review Group departs

**Day 4: Thursday, 7 March 2013**  
**Boardroom 1, Ardmore House**

08.45-09.30	Review Group private meeting
09.30-09.45	Meeting with Invigilator-in-Charge of Examinations
09.45-10.00	Coffee

10.00-10.30	Meeting with Academic Secretariat Staff
10.30-11.00	Meeting with Assessment Staff
11.00-11.30	Meeting with Admissions Staff
11.30-12.00	Meeting with Administrative Services Staff
12.00-12.30	Meeting with Student Recruitment Staff
12.30-13.00	Meeting with Vice-President for Students
13.00-13.45	Lunch
13.45-15.00	Review Group continue to prepare first draft of Review Group Report
15.00-15.15	Break
15.15-15.30	Meeting with Director, Assessment
15.15-17.00	Review Group continue to prepare first draft of Review Group Report and exit presentation.
17.00	Review Group departs

**DAY 5: Friday, 8 March 2013**  
**Boardroom 1, Ardmore House**

09.00-11.00	Review Group continue to prepare first draft of Review Group Report and exit presentation.
11.00-11.15	Break
11.15-11.45	Review Group appraise Head of Unit of initial outline commendations and recommendations
12.00-12.30	Exit presentation made by extern(s) members (or other member of Review Group, as agreed) to all available staff of the Unit, Room Q015, Quinn School
12.30-12.45	Break and return to Ardmore House
12.45-13.15	Lunch (Review Group only)
13.15-15.00	Review Group finalise first draft of Review Group Report and confirm arrangements for Report completion and deadline.
15.15	Review Group depart