



**University College Dublin**

**Periodic Quality Review**

**UCD Human Resources**

**April 2011**

**Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 11 October 2011**

## Table of Contents

	Page
1. Introduction and Context	3
2. Details of the Unit	9
3. Governance, Planning and Organisation	10
4. Functions, Activities and Processes	12
5. Management of Resources	19
6. User Perspective	21
7. Management of Quality and Enhancement	24
8. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges	25
9. Summary of Commendations and Recommendations	28
Appendix 1 Unit Response	
Appendix 2 Timetable for Site Visit	

## **1. Introduction and Context**

### ***Introduction***

- 1.1. This report presents the findings of a quality review of UCD Human Resources (UCD HR), at University College Dublin. The review was undertaken in April 2011.

### ***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. 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
  - 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 of 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 the UCD Human Resources was as follows:

- Professor Maurice Boland , Principal, UCD College of Life Sciences (Chair)
- Ms Marie Burke, Associate Librarian, UCD James Joyce Library (Deputy Chair)
- Mr Ian Black - Human Resources Director, University of Glasgow, Scotland
- Ms Kath Clarke - Director of Human Resources, University of Auckland, New Zealand

1.6. The Review Group visited the University from 11-14 April 2011 and had meetings with Unit and University staff, including: UCD HR staff members; the Vice-President for Staff; members of UCD Senior Management Team; Heads of School; Heads of Support Units; College Principals; SAR Co-ordinating Committee members; members of UCD academic staff; members of UCD administrative and technical staff and newly appointed UCD staff members. Representatives of all of the main UCD staff Unions were invited to meet with the Review Group. However, only one staff Union representative met with the Review Group, due to a perceived conflict of interest by other Union representatives with regard to the Review Group membership. The Review Group was disappointed that Unions representing UCD staff did not avail of the opportunity to contribute to the review process for UCD HR.

1.7. In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation provided by the Unit and the University (for example, data on UCD staff numbers; reports on HR initiatives; UCD Strategic Plan to 2014; information on UCD HR strategic planning process and stakeholder feedback).

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

1.8. UCD HR adopted a unique approach in co-ordinating their quality review self-assessment process. In tandem with the development of the Self-assessment Report (SAR), UCD HR undertook to also develop a new strategy for the Unit to run concurrently with the overall strategy for the University. This approach was taken to save on scarce resourcing and time and it was also noted that the method of gathering inputs for the strategy and

quality review processes was similar. As a result, a Strategy and Quality Review Steering Group (the Steering Group) was established comprising the Vice-President for Staff along with the four HR Directors.

The Steering Group had three objectives:

- (i) Provide strategic direction to the Strategy Development and Quality Review working groups
- (ii) Contribute specific inputs as requested by the working groups, e.g. conducting stakeholder consultation activity with UCD senior management
- (iii) Oversee the work of both groups, ensuring that deliverables outlined in their respective terms of reference are delivered on time and to an acceptable standard

The Steering Group met on a fortnightly basis

- 1.9. The members of the SAR Coordinating Committee were nominated by each of the four UCD HR directorates and comprise a cross-section of staff (in terms of grade and experience) from UCD HR. One of the primary objectives of the project (along with delivering upon the SAR) was to involve staff in an in-depth way throughout the process. As a result, working group members took ownership of the key steps within the process (i.e. conducted the staff SWOT analysis sessions, contributed to the selection and interview of key staff/interested parties, analysed and researched comparable external organisations to ascertain where best practice could apply to the UCD HR context, assisted in the communication of the project objectives to UCD HR and beyond, developed draft chapters of the Self-assessment Report). The members of the SAR Coordinating Committee are listed below:

- Rory Carey (Chair) – Director, HR Strategy & Development
- Sandra Coughlan (Project Manager) - Organisation Development Manager, HR Strategy & Development (until February 2011)
- Sinéad McNally – PA to the Vice-President for Staff
- Paul Fitzgerald – HR Officer, Recruitment, HR Services
- Anne Craig – Senior HR Assistant, Compensation & Benefits, HR Services
- Aoife Ni Ruanaigh – Project Co-ordinator, Compensation & Benefits, HR Services
- Alana Kenny – HR Assistant, Recruitment, HR Services
- Tanya Ferrie – Staff Development Officer, Training & Development, HR Strategy & Development
- Evangeline Leonard – HR Partner for Business & Law, HR Relationships

- Marcellina Fogarty – Employee Relations Specialist, HR Employee Relations, Equality & Diversity
- 1.10. A comprehensive programme of communications to all UCD HR staff was undertaken throughout the duration of the development of the SAR report as below:
- The Quality Review process was announced at the UCD HR Planning day in April 2010
  - Progress updates presented at quarterly to all UCD HR staff meetings in September and December 2010 and in March 2011.
  - UCD HR staff participated in SWOT analysis sessions in October and November 2010
  - UCD’s Governing Authority was advised that the UCD HR Quality Review was underway in December 2010
  - Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted in October and November 2010
  - Focus groups with University staff were conducted in November 2010
  - Updates were provided locally (at directorate level) at regular intervals by members of the SAR Coordinating Committee
  - Updates appeared as a standing item on the UCD HR Management team meeting agenda
  - The SAR was distributed internally for comment and feedback by all UCD HR staff

***The University***

1.11. 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 city.

1.12. 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 currently organised into 35 Schools in five Colleges:

- UCD College of Arts and Celtic Studies
- UCD College of Human Sciences
- UCD College of Life Sciences
- UCD College of Engineering, Mathematical and Physical Sciences
- UCD College of Business and Law

- 1.13. 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 4,600 international students from more than 120 countries.
- 1.14. UCD staff numbers for 2009/10 are set out below. The ratio of Academic to Administrative and other Support staff is 0.72, which is comparable to other Irish universities.<sup>1</sup>

***UCD Staff FTE Details 2009/10***

Academic Staff	1,061
Non-Academic	1,189
Support (ie Technical)	291
Research Funded	678
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,218</b>

- 1.15. A number of changes in Government policy, due to the national economic crisis significantly impact on the context in which UCD and all Irish universities, and UCD HR operate. An Employment Control Framework (ECF), implemented by the Irish Government, has been in place since 2009. This ECF imposes restrictive and complex measures on all public sector organisations and significantly limits the University’s autonomy with regard to recruitment and staffing issues. The ECF measures include a targeted reduction in staff numbers within the public sector at large, introduction of a range of remuneration reductions and curtailment of promotional and other formal developmental opportunities. The measures are technically complex to administer and set challenging timelines for implementation. Additionally, the public sector agreement, drawn up to support the country through the current fiscal situation, colloquially referred to as the ‘Croke Park Agreement’ will determine the industrial relations landscape for the foreseeable future.

***UCD Human Resources (UCD HR)***

- 1.16. UCD HR’s current mission is “to partner with the Management and Staff of the University to deliver high-quality HR services and management expertise in line with the University’s strategic goals.” To this end, a broad range of services are managed or supported by UCD HR including recruitment, staff, leadership and management development, compensation administration, HR management information systems, promotions, pensions, employee relations, equality and diversity and HR Partners.
- 1.17. The function went through a significant restructuring process in 2006-2007 following a period of extensive consultation with senior management, other management groupings and the staff of the University. As a result of this restructuring, the Unit has been evolving

---

<sup>1</sup> Source report on UCD Education Strategy KPIs June 2011

from a transactional 'personnel' function to a 'human resources'<sup>2</sup> unit offering a broader range of strategic and operational HR services. The Unit has continuously engaged with key stakeholders with the overall aim of continuous improvement. This is true to the Unit's stated values of 'Customer Focus', 'Service Excellence' and 'Continuous Improvement', identified as key values for the team post restructuring.

- 1.18. Since restructuring, the context within which the Unit operates has shifted significantly. Several significant cuts in state funding have affected the Education sector and in particular the third-level sector. UCD HR processes and workflows are heavily influenced by external factors and the Unit is regularly called upon to quickly develop and implement comprehensive solutions following government decisions. For example, external decisions in the areas of compensation and benefits, employment law and pensions have required a rapid response from UCD HR.
- 1.19. In 2008, UCD HR relocated the majority of its services to the newly refurbished Roebuck Offices. Prior to this, individual teams were based in a variety of locations around the campus. A notable exception to the centralisation of services are the HR Partners, who continue to have a presence in their respective colleges for the strategic purpose of staying strongly engaged in the operations of the colleges they serve.
- 1.20. The new facilities at Roebuck Offices represent a significant improvement for the Unit. The co-location of the various HR teams support effective cross-functional working. The standard of the accommodation is also much improved, with UCD HR having appropriate designated meeting rooms for the first time in its existence. However, the learning and development function does not have a designated "training room" despite being the provider of around 100 programmes a year. This is a major logistical issue with knock-on cost implications.
- 1.21. The UCD HR Management Team consists of the Vice-President for Staff and the directors of the four UCD HR directorates: HR Strategy & Development; HR Employee Relations, Equality & Diversity (ER); HR Services; HR Relationships.
- 1.22. The UCD HR team comprises 58 highly-qualified and experienced staff (51 full-time and 7 part-time). The overall staff profile is in line with HR staffing in comparable institutions. Many staff members are educated to postgraduate level in HR and related areas. 50% of staff are educated to level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications, with a further 46% educated to level 8. The team presents a relatively young profile, with 64% of staff currently under the age of 39. However, another significant section of staff (24%) are between 50-65 years. This may present some challenges in the future with regard to staff turnover, loss of organisational knowledge and required replacements due to retirements, etc. Strong succession planning and the ability to replace staff will be important to address this issue. Generally, there are limited staff retention issues in the current climate.

---

<sup>2</sup> A model which features a HR Partner role, focused on understanding and enabling the people-aspects of the organisation's operations, supported by highly efficient and effective transactional service units, and strategic centres of excellence

- 1.23. HR staff are distributed across the four directorates in varying numbers, as set out below, depending on the nature and scale of activities within each directorate. Additionally, one staff member works within the Office of the Vice President for Staff.

### **Staffing Profile of UCD HR Directorates**

HR Strategy & Development  
HR Employee Relations, Equality & Diversity  
HR Services  
HR Relationships

- 1.24. The team is highly experienced with almost 50% working at UCD for six years or more. The restructuring resulted in external HR professionals joining the team, working with more experienced staff to tailor good human resources practice to the working realities of the university environment.

## **2. Details of the Unit**

- 2.1. Whilst the information regarding details of the Unit in the SAR was useful and informative, the SAR did not contain a full organisation chart for the Unit detailing numbers and grades of staff assigned to each directorate. It would have been of assistance to the Review Group to have full details of the unit at the outset, however, additional information, including UCD HR staff data was provided by UCD HR in advance of the site visit.
- 2.2. There is considerable variability in the size of the directorates, with HR services undertaking the majority of transactional activities. Whilst these transactional activities may be of less strategic importance, their effective functioning is of vital importance to the credibility of the University. Some consideration should be given to moving some of the services functions to other areas. (Detailed analysis of each directorate is covered elsewhere in this Report)
- 2.3. Whilst the location of all HR staff in the centralised Roebuck Offices has undoubtedly helped to develop a strong team spirit, there is a concern that the Unit may develop somewhat of a silo mentality *vis-à-vis* the wider University community. One academic commented to the Review Group – “. . . as HR were made peripheral they became peripheral”, which captures a view in the University that the Unit has become less visible.

### **Commendations**

- 2.4. The Unit has undergone significant changes in the last 4-5 years and this seems to have been managed very successfully with the new structure now well established.
- 2.5. Recent recruitment of staff to UCD HR from outside the education sector has enhanced the skills profile of the Unit and there is a good blend of new and longer serving staff working well together.

- 2.6. All staff encountered during the review process were committed, professional, enthusiastic and motivated. In their contributions to the review process they were open and honest and very engaged with the process.
- 2.7. Within the Unit and the directorates there is a strong sense of team camaraderie - a clear vision of their own mission and how it fits into the overall UCD HR picture and the wider UCD plan.
- 2.8. There appears to be good and open communication within the Unit.
- 2.9. Offices and meeting facilities in Roebuck are to a very high standard and provide a welcoming ambience for all visitors to the facility.
- 2.10. Access to the full suite of current policies, procedures and forms via the UCD HR Website was noted as a very positive development.

### ***Recommendations***

- 2.11. Review the current staffing numbers across directorates.
- 2.12. Ensure that UCD HR staff have a presence, both formally and informally, on the wider Belfield Campus.

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

- 3.1. UCD has no formal Governance arrangements for HR per se, in the way of a HR Committee: this is not a disadvantage when UCD HR has representation at three key management forums of the University (UCD Senior Management Team Finance & Operations Group (FOG), Budget Review Committee (BRC) and UCD Senior Management Team - Executive). HR presence within these structures allows the University to have a two-way relationship with UCD HR. Senior Academics and other managers can discuss external HR drivers and agree how best to implement them, and the Vice-President for Staff can champion HR issues which need to be in place and supported by academics and others to make the external drivers work, but more importantly, create capacity for the future as the economic situation improves. However, the forums need to make use of the opportunities available under these arrangements.
- 3.2. UCD HR has a very significant workload, and like other parts of the University, has declining resources. This situation may have serious implications for the planning and delivery of UCD HR's services. There are many initiatives; some imposed by external agencies and/or legislation, as well as "HR good practice" initiatives. While these developments are to be welcomed, the relative priority of each initiative is not always clear, nor the resource implications for UCD HR, and assessment of the potential impact on the rest of the Institution. The Vice-President for Staff has set up weekly operational reviews, and the developing Strategic Plan for HR will help clarify these points. Effective dissemination of the University's HR priorities to the UCD HR and wider communities will be critical to maximise the efficient use of resources, and to maximise acceptance, particularly by members of the senior academic community.

- 3.3. The University has had its current strategic plan for some while: a HR strategic plan will help ensure optimal alignment with the University's Plan, and will help mould UCD HR staff' perceptions. This should be a priority.
- 3.4. The split between a corporate HR function in Roebuck House, and HR Partners embedded in academic and other areas has proved to be successful since its introduction 2007/08. Introduced at a time of expansion, the HR Partners have proved to be very successful in times of stress. The split allows UCD HR to have access to key decision makers in Colleges whilst retaining core expertise on many features of HR concentrated in one location, and also economies of scale in transactional matters. Some felt that without this matrix, there could be more of a silo approach in the central UCD HR function. For some clients, the location of Roebuck House is an issue, but not for others. Its visibility is a continuing challenge for all parts of UCD HR, regardless of location. Other sections of this report discuss the management structure in more detail.

### ***Issues/Observations***

- 3.5. To date, the wider, long term "people" issues may have been pushed off UCD Senior Management Team agendas as UCD struggles to deal with a changed economic and legislative framework. There is a danger, in the context of current pressures, that capacity will not be developed within the University, to respond to emerging institutional needs, into the future.
- 3.6. There are many references to fairly frequent meetings within UCD HR. In the context of enhancing quality in institutional and Unit processes, it is important that the effectiveness of meetings is considered as a factor when planning and evaluating use of resources. .
- 3.7. The absence of HR Partners in some large areas of the University is a major issue – particularly if these are areas with challenging employee relations. Sourcing additional HR Partners may mean stripping resource from some central areas, if no recruitment is possible. Funding sources need to be clarified, and a more equitable allocation model made public.
- 3.8. In some areas, UCD HR was still perceived as more transactional and fire-fighting: not all saw it as a potential change agent

### ***Commendations***

- 3.9. UCD HR has a presence at University Senior Management Team and has representation within many other key teams in Colleges.
- 3.10. UCD HR values are well articulated.
- 3.11. The alignment of HR function with Payroll function is a positive feature.
- 3.12. The planned move of the HR function away from a more transactional Personnel approach some years ago was successful.

3.13. The enthusiasm, expertise and dedication of UCD HR staff that the Review Group met.

3.14. The fact that development of the UCD HR Strategy is now well under way.

### ***Recommendations***

3.15. The UCD Senior Management Team may need to devote specific time to articulating what it wants of the University's staff, agreeing what each manager will do to support agreed changes, and agreeing the resources available for the priorities. This should perhaps be reviewed annually. This will allow UCD HR to ensure its Strategy closely relates both to the explicit needs of the University, and to the often less well defined but essential "emotional" needs of managers and staff.

3.16. The HR Directors define the priorities for the initiatives, possibly reducing the number, but ensuring the remainder are delivered to time, cost and specification, and fully meet client expectations: this may also involve very focussed communications.

3.17. The UCD HR strategy should be completed as expeditiously as possible, with high levels of client consultation and participation.

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

### ***4.1. Management and Decision Making Culture***

#### ***Commendations***

4.1.1. The Unit is well structured to deliver a range of HR services which are transactional, operational and with some early development of strategic and organisational development capability.

4.1.2. There is a strong commitment to collaboration between directorates and the co-location in Roebuck House assists this.

4.1.3. While each Director appears to have clear responsibility for specific activities there are mechanisms in place to enable collaborative decision making as a management team.

#### ***Recommendations***

4.1.4. Consider whether the current range of UCD HR management meetings are necessary and whether they could be streamlined for greater efficiency without compromising effectiveness of decision making and collaboration.

## 4.2. HR Services

### *Issues/Observations*

- 4.2.1. This is the largest directorate in UCD HR, responsible for transactional activities such as payroll administration<sup>3</sup>, pension administration and advice, recruitment support, management of internal promotions and grading and an information and document management system.
- 4.2.2. The CORE HR system was implemented 10 years ago and its functionality has not been fully utilised.
- 4.2.3. There appear to be a lot of manual transactions and forms such as annual leave applications, approvals and processing.
- 4.2.4. The reviewers heard evidence to suggest that there is duplication of data entry of staff details in payroll administration and the payroll team.
- 4.2.5. The business analyst function appears to focus primarily on process mapping and systems analyst activities. There is an urgent need to develop an enhanced business analysis capability within UCD HR in order to inform decision making within the University.
- 4.2.6. The small Human Resources Information System (HRIS) team has a heavy workload of routine support activities such as system maintenance, supporting user access and security, producing standard and ad hoc reports in addition to providing essential development and testing on a range of HR projects.
- 4.2.7. The Recruitment team is involved in a range of activities beyond pure recruitment such as contract renewals and managing work visa applications.
- 4.2.8. The *AskHR*<sup>4</sup> service doesn't appear to have high visibility and was almost not mentioned at all by staff groups encountered during the Review. There was quite wide criticism of the inability to contact relevant UCD HR staff to discuss specific issues or needs. Staff reported almost always getting a voicemail message rather than a real person, and then significant delays in receiving a response. (See also section 5.3 regarding UCD staff expectations of HR services)
- 4.2.9. *AskHR* queries submitted by email are logged on an Excel spreadsheet with limited reporting and analysis.
- 4.2.10. Some new staff reported significant delays in getting paid with some individuals requiring emergency advances to cover them for payment delays of up to two months. These delays are frequently caused by factors outside of UCD HR but result in delays in

---

<sup>3</sup> HR Compensation and Benefits team – payroll processing is the responsibility of the UCD Bursar's Office

<sup>4</sup> *AskHR* - Online tool to provide UCD staff with accurate answers to HR queries

HR processes. Every effort should be made by UCD HR and others in UCD to address the causes of delays and ensure that payments to new staff issue on time.

- 4.2.11. Some new staff reported receiving their contracts just a few days before they started work at UCD. Delays in issuing contracts may result from factors outside the purview of UCD HR. However, the causes of delays, whether within UCD HR or elsewhere, should be addressed in order to issue contracts in a timely way.

### **Commendations**

- 4.2.12. The E-Recruitment tool was viewed favourably by the group of newly appointed staff that met the Review Group. It was described as intuitive and easy to upload an application.
- 4.2.13. Staff reported an improvement in accessing HR policies on the UCD HR website.
- 4.2.14. Automation of timesheets has reduced a significant volume of manual processing.
- 4.2.15. The implementation of *Touchpaper*<sup>5</sup> should enable UCD HR to improve its tracking, reporting and analysis of staff queries, and enable staff to find answers to routine questions using the knowledge base functionality.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.2.16. Consider implementing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between HRIS and payroll to clarify roles and responsibilities, eliminate duplication of data entry and/or checking data.
- 4.2.17. Review payroll deadlines in conjunction with the development of an SLA to allow greatest possible flexibility to ensure the efficiency of getting new staff on the payroll without the need for advance payments.
- 4.2.18. Develop a Service Level Agreement with clear timeframes for various parts of the recruitment process to ensure a high quality service to new staff and hiring managers.
- 4.2.19. Review the competing demands on the HRIS team and assess whether the current staffing level and skills profile is adequate.
- 4.2.20. Review the Business Analyst function in order to develop an enhanced business analysis capacity in the HR Strategy area to support management decision making.
- 4.2.21. Assess the return on investment of a more significant investment in the development of Core HR to enable efficiency and effectiveness gains and allow a reprioritisation of resources to higher value activities.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Touchpaper* – business support software to enhance service to employees and clients

- 4.2.22. Ensure there is a comprehensive communication plan to support the launch of *Touchpaper* with clearly articulated service levels in respect of response timeframes, and a commitment to reporting activity levels, and resolution rates to UCD staff.
- 4.2.23. There needs to be more effective co-ordination between the roles and responsibilities of UCD HR Recruitment and UCD Research to facilitate the efficient appointment of post docs. It is important that the UCD policies and procedures on research appointments that have been developed in recent years, are consistently used by all parties.

### **4.3. HR Relationships**

#### ***Issues/Observations***

- 4.3.1. It was noted that HR Partners are under resourced; “please could I have a clone” was not an uncommon sentiment expressed by staff who met with the Review Group.
- 4.3.2. Some areas have no HR Partner and this is problematic in that they feel they don’t have a dedicated professional who understands their particular context and needs.
- 4.3.3. The focus of activity varies between HR Partners and appears to be influenced by personal strengths and interests, and, in some cases, the specific needs of the College Principal. HR Partners attend College Executive meetings and some spend time on more strategic, future-focussed activities while others appear to spend much of their time on individual case management. The commentary on differences in roles is not intended as a criticism of individual HR Partners but is a reflection of the finding that the HR Partner roles vary throughout different Colleges/units in the University.
- 4.3.4. It was noted that the quality of service provided by HR Partners is determined by both the quality of the individual, College Principal needs and College/unit approaches, rather than by a systematic UCD HR-wide approach.
- 4.3.5. HR Partners seemed positive and clear about the relationship they have with the Employee Relations, Equality & Diversity Directorate (ER) and the role ER plays in assisting with disputes and other employee relations issues. Staff in management roles outside UCD HR did not have the same level of understanding and were generally critical of UCD HR for its approach to supporting proactive management of poor performers.

#### ***Commendations***

- 4.3.6. The introduction of HR Partners is a real success story for UCD HR. There was strong support for the role and value of HR Partners in assisting College Principals and Heads of School and Units to manage people in their areas of responsibility.
- 4.3.7. The HR Partners appear to work effectively as a team and provide professional support for each other, for Schools and for Colleges.

- 4.3.8. There appears to be a co-ordinated approach to providing services to Colleges, with the HR Partners working together to deal with workload peaks and troughs and cover for absences.

### ***Recommendations***

- 4.3.9. The Review Group understands that the portfolios of HR Partners are being changed to more evenly distribute them amongst the Colleges and Units, and to provide HR Partner support for units that currently have no one allocated to them. In some cases this is likely to spread the HR Partners more thinly than they currently are, and may result in diminished service to some areas. From a customer service perspective this may be a real challenge for UCD HR.
- 4.3.10. It is desirable to increase the overall level of HR Partner resource; however this may be impossible in the current environment. It is difficult to identify activities or roles in central UCD HR areas that could be reduced or eliminated to fund additional HR Partner resource.
- 4.3.11. Consideration should be given to more clearly defining the role of the HR Partner to ensure that their professional skills are being fully used and represent value for money. Consideration should be given to whether they are spending time on administrative and co-ordination activities that could be undertaken elsewhere or eliminated through process improvement and technology solutions such as improving the use of *AskHR* and *Touchpaper*.

## **4.4. HR Strategy and Development**

### ***Issues/Observations***

- 4.4.1. This area has potential to develop and implement high value, strategic activities that will make UCD a great place to work, where staff can reach their potential and contribute to the University's aspiration encapsulated in Forming Global Minds.
- 4.4.2. It isn't clear what the UCD HR strategy is at present or how and why is it changing from the one designed in 2006/07.
- 4.4.3. In the proposed new HR strategy, the first objective is to "Enable SMT's People Strategy". It is not clear that the UCD Senior Management Team has a clearly articulated People Strategy.
- 4.4.4. The Review Group found low awareness amongst UCD staff about development of the UCD HR strategy despite UCD HR having engaged in a consultation process with the University community on the development of the strategy.
- 4.4.5. Many UCD staff members that met the Review Group do not know what HR do beyond the obvious recruitment, administration, payroll, and pension activities.

- 4.4.6. In the current economic times, some of the staff development activities appear to have been discontinued, although total levels of provision in staff development activities remain high. In the absence of salary increases and promotions, skills development is a relatively inexpensive way to foster staff engagement and improve morale.
- 4.4.7. Only half of the new staff members that the Review Group met with had had a structured induction or orientation in their College or Unit.

### ***Commendations***

- 4.4.8. The Review Group heard praise of some of the projects that have been undertaken over the last couple of years including the Research Career Framework and the contribution that HR staff capability brought to this project.
- 4.4.9. New staff and Heads of School Induction Workshops are valued by staff, although there were issues raised regarding the relevance of all components for all attendees.
- 4.4.10. The introduction of coaching and in particular the initiative to develop UCD Coaches is a positive and effective way to support staff development.
- 4.4.11. New staff value induction, but questioned the relevance of some components for all staff.

### ***Recommendations***

- 4.4.12. The vacant Organisational Development role needs to be replaced as a high priority to ensure that key projects and developments such as the review of PMDS are well supported, in addition to providing a change management capability to support the many changes occurring throughout the University.
- 4.4.13. The new HR Strategy needs to be based on clarification of UCD Senior Management Team's people strategy and priorities. It needs the visible support of the UCD Senior Management Team and requires consultation with staff across the University to develop UCD staff engagement with the overall objectives and outcomes.
- 4.4.14. Consideration needs to be given to the timing of the Heads of School induction. There is merit in running some modules for incoming Heads as preparation several months before they take up the role.
- 4.4.15. It would be useful for UCD HR to provide evidence for the value of a planned induction, and to develop a framework and checklist for local level induction with guidance for managers.

#### **4.5. HR Employee Relations, Equality and Diversity (ER)**

##### ***Issues/Observations***

- 4.5.1. There is a lack of clarity about UCD's philosophy and the institutional approach to employees. The stated view is that a low risk approach is taken, with a focus on protecting UCD's reputation. This appears to be somewhat in conflict with the UCD Senior Management Team's quite high tolerance for risk and its innovative, ambitious approach to positioning the University in Ireland and internationally.
- 4.5.2. In the past, there appeared to have been a legacy of a high tolerance of poor performance and a reluctance to deal with poor performance. However, this appears to be changing quite quickly in the current environment.
- 4.5.3. Some managers report a lack of support from UCD HR for managers dealing with performance and other employee relations issues. However, Employee Relations' staff report that managers often want a quick resolution without having appropriate evidence to support this.
- 4.5.4. There seems to be low awareness and use of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)/Mediation service, despite UCD HR's efforts at providing information about the mechanisms.

##### ***Commendations***

- 4.5.5. The Employee Relations Directorate demonstrates a strong understanding of the external legal and public policy context in which the University operates.

##### ***Recommendations***

- 4.5.6. There is an urgent need to clarify UCD's philosophy and approach to managing ER issues in the context of its responsibilities as a Public Service employer and under its statutory obligations via the Universities Act. This should include clarifying the tolerance of risk, and extent to which the University will "take on" issues when it is the right thing to do.
- 4.5.7. The Review Group recommends that the HR Directors communicate with managers to clarify information and expectations about the supports that are available for managers, in order to assist them with employee relations issues. To enhance clarity, information about supports should distinguish between support from HR Partners and support from the Employee Relations Directorate, and should outline when issues will be escalated to external/third parties.
- 4.5.8. A clear, documented process for managers to deal with poor performers amongst staff may be usefully supported by development of a Frequently Asked Questions resource and short workshop/briefing that HR Partners can use to inform managers and Heads.
- 4.5.9. In tandem with implementing the above recommendations, the Review Group suggests that consideration be given to clarifying the role of an agreed internal procedure for

resolution of disputes. Issues to be addressed could include clarifying when the service should be used and by whom and whether it could be used more effectively for early dispute resolution and lead to a lower number of issues being escalated to external parties.

## **5. Management of Resources**

- 5.1. Overall, UCD HR appears to have a professional and planned approach to managing itself. There is a clear commitment from the VP for Staff and Directors to developing staff through a range of channels, including resourcing projects with staff from across the Unit, job rotation and formal learning. There are clear gaps in resources in the HRIS and Organisational Development areas, and users of UCD HR services would welcome increased HR Partner resource. A challenge for UCD HR is to examine whether there are opportunities to reconsider how it uses its resources in order to free up staffing and other resources for under resourced areas that have the capacity to enhance the quality of HR services.
- 5.2. Continued investment in process efficiency and increased Employee Self Service (ESS) use for routine transactions may assist with reprioritising resources in the medium term. Examples of this include automation of leave applications and training enrolments.
- 5.3. If the implementation of *Touchpaper* (in particular the use of the knowledge base functionality), is well communicated and used effectively by UCD staff, it should result in greater self service for routine questions and less UCD HR staff time spent on these. There is a need for quite a change in culture with strong leadership sponsorship if this is to be achieved. Currently, there appears to be a culture within the University, of expecting UCD HR staff to be available at the end of the phone on demand. It appears that UCD cannot afford this luxury when there are more cost effective alternatives available to assist staff as and when they need answers to routine questions.

### **5.4. Finance**

#### ***Issues/Observations***

- 5.4.1. The focus on streamlining processes and using technology more effectively are positive initiatives. It was not, however, clear to the Review Group, that these developments had resulted in efficiency gains. An example is the introduction of automated timesheets. UCD HR staff noted that although thousands of transactions are now automated, their workload has not reduced. This seems unusual and requires exploration.

#### ***Commendations***

- 5.4.2. The VP for Staff and HR Directors appear to have a professional and structured approach to financial management. They are currently planning a three year financial view, and on a weekly basis have a finance meeting that replicates the University-wide finance meeting.

- 5.4.3. UCD HR has played a key role in implementing a range of cost saving initiatives to assist the University to manage in the current economic climate. These include the Shorter Working Year and Career Break options.

***Recommendation***

- 5.4.4. The Review Group recommends that project close out processes and post-implementation reviews need to critically assess the impact (and efficiency gains) on workloads, potential for savings in time and therefore capacity to resource other activities.

**5.5. *ITS/MIS***

***Issues/Observations***

- 5.5.1. This area seems under-resourced, not only in numbers, but in specialised skills to achieve an ambitious programme of work. There are issues with data integrity and timeliness of delivering reports to groups external to UCD HR (the precise nature of the issues, and possible solutions, were not clear to the Review Group but would need to be explored). There was a sense of a lack of trust between Finance and HRIS in relation to access to data.

***Commendations***

- 5.5.2. There is a visible commitment to automation of processes to improve the user experience e.g. *e-Recruitment*, and to providing reports to support management decision making.

***Recommendations***

- 5.5.3. Development of an agreed Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Finance and HRIS in relation to the working relationship and provision of reports would assist with efficiency and effectiveness of processes.
- 5.5.4. The issue of data integrity needs to be more clearly understood in order to find a solution that ensures data quality. Issues such as which data is problematic and reasons for the problems need to be addressed (e.g. whether problems are definitional and/or data entry and quality assurance issues).
- 5.5.5. Projects and initiatives need to be prioritised so that HRIS efforts can focus on the most important, high value work. If projects are de-scoped as part of this process there needs to be clear communication with those who will be impacted upon, outlining the reasons for the change in priorities.

## **5.6. Communications**

### ***Issues/Observations***

- 5.6.1. A number of UCD staff were critical of the level of communications from UCD HR. These criticisms included not knowing UCD HR staff or what they do.
- 5.6.2. Changes in processes that impact on managers do not appear to be communicated in a proactive way - “we find out by accident” was a common complaint.
- 5.6.3. The tone of communications on major matters such as the implementation of the recent government directives were seen as being insensitive by some.
- 5.6.4. Some communications were viewed as very generic and not tailored for particular audiences and their needs.

### ***Commendations***

- 5.6.5. There are a variety of internal communication channels to keep UCD HR staff informed and connected with each other. Effective use of these may reduce the need for some face-to-face meetings.

### ***Recommendations***

- 5.6.6. As identified in the SAR, it would be useful to tailor communications for specific audiences to ensure their information needs are being met in a relevant way.
- 5.6.7. The role of the UCD HR Communications team should be developed to include assessment of communication mechanisms/channels and co-ordination of UCD HR communications and messages with the University community.
- 5.6.8. The Unit should consider whether there are effective, low cost and appropriate ways to communicate UCD HR activities and inform the wider UCD community about the various roles and people within UCD HR.
- 5.6.9. Consider having an agreed protocol whereby significant and sensitive communications from UCD HR are previewed (for tone, clarity, etc) by a small number of users for feedback before being sent out more widely.

## **6. User Perspective**

- 6.1. The HR function in any research intensive University faces challenges not often seen in other organisations: the academic staff and academic managers’ focus on maximising flexibility for Research and Teaching may not always be aligned with external employment legislation, “best practice”, and structured operational processes. HR in Universities must do everything it can to minimise the impact of the latter two issues on the Academic Community, and having as light a touch as possible resulting from legislative obligations.

This can all be a major challenge, particularly in the current Irish situation where legislators are making many very significant changes at fairly short notice.

- 6.2. The pressures of the wider context may result in UCD HR being seen as blocking progress. This is clearly the view of some users, whether justified or not, and whether based on current reality or a memory of a very different Personnel Administration service. However, many of the groups consulted during the compilation of this report had very positive views, and welcomed the embedding of HR Partners, with the resultant easier access to UCD HR. Other staff reported that there had been many improvements in most HR areas over the past few years.
- 6.3. Where there were criticisms, they came in two main areas – the speed and accuracy of some transactional services, and the fundamental problems of some of the policies, particularly some more recent ones – e.g. PMDS, Research Careers and aspects coming from the Croke Park Agreement.
- 6.4. UCD HR has recently implemented some better issue tracking arrangements in some transactional areas, and more are in the pipeline. There appears to be, however, little review of actual statistical information, and the Review Group saw little evidence of systematic client feedback. This will continue to be a source of complaint if not addressed.
- 6.5. University policy was seen by many senior UCD staff as creating particular problems – for example, the PMDS system which has less focus on performance than some say they would wish for; linkages to the current perceived operation of (long standing) Grievance/Disciplinary arrangements handled by the Employee Relations arrangements, and the frequent recourse to external bodies.
- 6.6. What was less clear were the academic and other managers' perceptions of acceptable levels of risk, views on the necessity of managers applying rigour to the operation of PMDS in their own areas of responsibility, and the impact of legacy issues on managers who were only recently appointed in rotating roles. UCD HR was sometimes seen as protecting employees rather than facilitating management action; however the context of such views was not explained.
- 6.7. Some legislative changes such as the Fixed Term Workers Act arrangements were viewed with hostility, in part due to the curtailment of previous contractual flexibility – and in part to the way it was perceived that changes had been implemented. It was difficult for the Review Group to distinguish which of the two issues dominated and whether the communications surrounding these matters were as effective as they could have been.
- 6.8. A service function constantly needs to get feedback from its clients – some of whom only use the service infrequently. Systematic client satisfaction enquiries can help ensure the function is able to give the best service within the organisational and resource constraints. UCD HR is looking at Service Level Agreements (SLAs): this requires systematic monitoring and feedback. If successfully implemented, SLAs can lead to substantial quality improvements.

- 6.9. From UCD HR's perspective, there have been a number of initiatives to ensure clients can get access to information (the UCD HR website; *AskHR*), and some regular contacts (the allocation of specific individuals in recruitment), but not all users have seen these flow through. Of course, infrequent users of UCD HR services may have particular difficulties because of their unfamiliarity with the function.
- 6.10. Some managers commented favourably on staff development activities, recognising that they needed both "softer" skills as well as the hard information on University processes.

### ***Issues/Observations***

- 6.11. UCD HR may often "get the blame" for unpopular UCD Senior Management Team (and wider Government) decisions – addressing this requires excellent, effective communications, and clear statements of commitment by the key Institutional leaders.
- 6.12. UCD HR, being at the end of the recruitment chain, sometimes gets blamed for failings elsewhere. This could be improved if there was scope for cross-functional business process improvements. Review of areas with the longest recruitment times could identify improvements that can be implemented quickly.
- 6.13. It was not clear what dialogue was possible with managers before Government requirements were implemented e.g. the Public Service Agreement (PSA) issues – which might reinforce negative views of the HR approach. These are challenging communications issues, but if not concisely explained and effectively managed (within legal constraints), will continue to cause problems from the users' perspectives.
- 6.14. The University's attitude to risk is unclear. This appeared to be true both among client managers, and amongst UCD HR staff.
- 6.15. UCD HR's user-information is often qualitative rather than quantitative. This creates the risk of the person who shouts loudest being heard (this may have positive or negative outcomes), and real trends may not be detected if relevant high quality numerical data is not used in service monitoring and development.
- 6.16. The necessity and success (or otherwise) of managing research careers may be worthy of more effective communication, combined with local reviews of the most effective ways to implement the policy.

### ***Commendations***

- 6.17. UCD HR sought a variety of users' views in developing the SAR.
- 6.18. Experienced HR staff, some with recent industry experience, bring a good client focus.
- 6.19. There are many good reports of HR Partners' effectiveness, and their ability to help managers gain access to the "right" person in central UCD HR – this was particularly reported from middle and junior managers.

## ***Recommendations***

- 6.20. The apparent disconnect between UCD HR and some senior academic managers needs to be addressed urgently, to assess if UCD HR really meets their priorities. This should include discussion on attitudes to risk. There should be consideration of introducing a simple risk matrix in communications and decision-making processes.
- 6.21. The perceived role and alleged bias (toward the employee) of Employee Relations should be examined and UCD HR may need to consider how best to present the reality of current procedures to managers. In the longer term, there should be a review of the effectiveness of the voluntary resort to external bodies.
- 6.22. The absence of any plans for staff attitude surveys and client satisfaction surveys should be addressed quickly: there are now a variety of inexpensive software resources available to allow a lower cost solution.
- 6.23. The Performance element of PMDS should be reviewed, and strengthened appropriately for Academic users. The issue of who the reviewer is should also be clarified. The balance of obtaining trade union consensus and ensuring fitness for purpose should be critically reviewed. PMDS links to Workload Models should be clear, where appropriate.
- 6.24. There should be consideration of the need for training both HR Partners and key corporate UCD HR staff in influencing and consultancy skills, to ensure line managers are more aware of the complexities of their HR issues and that UCD HR staff are well equipped to offer the maximum flexibility within organisational, financial and legal constraints. This training will also help to enable all UCD HR staff deliver a more consistent approach, and reduce perceptions that UCD HR service quality varies depending on the individual.

## **7. Management of Quality and Enhancement**

- 7.1. As evidenced from the SAR and in the Review Group meetings with UCD HR staff, it is clear that they take the quality agenda very seriously and that in the development and that ongoing review of processes and procedures focus very clearly on improving the quality of service.
- 7.2. Managing the quality agenda in times of diminishing resources will no doubt be challenging, but highlights the necessity for more formalised metrics to measure and monitor service developments.

## ***Issues/Observations***

- 7.3. Some of the recent developments, which are undoubtedly service enhancements, may not always align with the customer's perception of their required need. Online services may sometimes need to be wrapped in the human envelope.

- 7.4. SLAs, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Benchmarking are in common use in HR and service divisions in many public and private sector organisations. In general these are underdeveloped areas for universities, although the financial realities and public policy changes in several jurisdictions are resulting in quite rapid changes and considerable focus on development in these areas.

### ***Commendations***

- 7.5. UCD HR has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the SAR provides evidence of examples of improvement initiatives, e.g. projects such as Online Time Sheets and the soon-to-be-launched Online Pensions Information have been developed, both to improve in-house procedures and also out of user-defined need.
- 7.6. UCD HR has an ambitious programme of work for 2011 relative to its available resources.
- 7.7. As described in the SAR and evidenced in the Review Group meetings with Directors and the VP for Staff, UCD HR understands the value of having a structured approach to SLAs, KPIs and Benchmarking, in order to support delivery of professional services.
- 7.8. New initiatives, such as the case tracking metrics in HR Relationships, are an excellent development and will provide a platform for further developments
- 7.9. In developing new metrics in this area, UCD HR sees a unique opportunity to take a lead at the national level.

### ***Recommendations***

- 7.10. Measuring and reporting on the impact of continuous improvement initiatives in a clear, concise and consistent way to the University community, would enable staff to understand more clearly what UCD HR does, and the value of the unit's improvement activities.
- 7.11. There should be a focus on developing SLAs to clarify expectations and customer service standards.
- 7.12. The Review Group recommends caution when developing HR KPIs, to ensure that they not only focus on inputs but also on outputs, impact and links to UCD strategic priorities.

## **8. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges**

- 8.1. The UCD HR Working Group prepared a SAR which contained much useful information and facilitated constructive discussion during meetings with the Review Group in the course of the site visit. However, as can be the nature of documents compiled by a large group, the SAR was somewhat patchy in the quality of its information and appeared to be somewhat disjointed as individual sections were clearly written by a number of different people.

### ***Strengths***

- 8.2. The SAR captured many of the strengths of the Unit. Discussions with staff from across the University indicated that the overall service from UCD HR has improved considerably in recent years.
- 8.3. There was almost unanimous support for the HR Partner model, although it was widely accepted that the level of service was not distributed proportionally in relation to the size of the individual units. Some units had no HR Partner service. It was evident that the quality of the service and the particular focus of the HR Partner was highly dependent on the calibre and interest area of the individual HR Partners and the requirements of College Principals/other Heads. It is acknowledged by UCD HR that this will change before September 2011, when the modified academic structures will be in place. Units are using the HR Partner in different ways – one user indicated that they are using the HR Partner as a form of internal consultant, while another sees the HR Partner as a broker. The Review Group considered these to be constructive developments.
- 8.4. The provision of training/orientation to new staff is working well and is something that must be continued, although it would be useful to consider the different needs of new staff with some concerns about the relevance of some parts of orientation.

### ***Weaknesses/Areas for Development***

- 8.5. THE SAR lists eighteen areas of weakness/for development and many of these were confirmed by staff meetings with the Review Group.
- 8.6. Understanding of the role and function of UCD HR was not always clearly understood by staff and this will result in criticism for HR when in fact such criticism is not warranted or justified. The SAR identified a role for UCD Senior Management Team - Executive to be involved in setting and driving the “people agenda” and the Review Group fully support that idea. It may be useful to devote two meetings of UCD Senior Management Team - Executive primarily to HR agenda items that will ensure that UCD Senior Management is fully supporting and contributing to prioritising the UCD HR yearly strategic agenda.
- 8.7. The issue of managing poor performance received considerable discussion and there is a gap between the perceptions of managers and of UCD HR as to the support provided for middle managers. UCD staff perceived that there is little or no support for the manager, while staff within ER identified that the HR Partners now provide early intervention with the mission of bringing about early resolution without the need to engage a third party. This development of early resolution interventions is something that is very welcome and should be publicised more widely across the University.
- 8.8. The visibility of UCD HR services is not what it could be in a number of areas, particularly in relation to who is responsible for managing new appointments. There is a list of staff associated with particular Units/Colleges but this is not widely known and must be made available to all Schools/Colleges/Units.

- 8.9. The timeline for appointment of research staff was considered to be too long by many academics – especially as many appointees will be already employed by UCD. UCD HR should consider taking steps to shorten the process, while also ensuring that newly appointed staff members are set up on payroll as quickly as possible.
- 8.10. There is a sense that UCD HR is not always aware of what the customer requires. Effort is needed to ensure that UCD HR takes a systematic approach to achieving what is required – but this will require strong and clear two-way communication.

### ***Opportunities***

- 8.11. While UCD HR brings professional innovation, expertise and advice to a range of people-focussed initiatives, the staff agenda needs to be owned and given equal sponsorship as that given to other strategic areas such as student engagement.
- 8.12. Better engagement with the UCD Senior Management Team - Executive will ensure that a well supported and strategic work programme will be in place and will lead to a better service from UCD HR, resulting in potentially better credit to UCD HR for achievements.
- 8.13. Where possible, UCD HR should build on the strong and well designed Leadership and Development programmes that it has launched. Care must be taken to ensure that bespoke rather than generic programmes are put in place for particular categories/groups of staff. It is desirable to have specific programmes for different categories of staff.
- 8.14. UCD HR is seen as generally conservative. The Unit should consider taking a more innovative and bold approach to leadership, management and staff development, especially in relation to management of under-performing staff. Clear direction from the UCD Senior Management Team will assist with this.
- 8.15. There is an apparent or real disconnect between HRIS, Management Services Unit (MSU) and Finance in relation to provision of quality reports in a timely fashion. Demands for information may come from outside the University, imposing strict timelines which are sometimes not met. A working group from the three units should be established to ensure that the optimum service is produced in the most timely and efficient manner.
- 8.16. The perception of UCD HR is not always positive within the University, nevertheless, there is a great opportunity for UCD HR to show leadership in the current economic downturn. Putting innovative and imaginative HR policies and procedures in place will enable all staff to achieve their maximum output, while maintaining a good work-life balance.
- 8.17. An air of uncertainty hangs over UCD staff in the current economic climate; an opportunity presents itself for UCD HR to provide leadership in ensuring that staff are well appraised of threats/challenges that lie ahead while at the same time developing policies that will enable UCD to be ahead of the curve when the recession ends.

### ***Threats/Challenges***

- 8.18. Like all other Units/Colleges/Schools in the University, UCD HR will face a cutback in staff numbers. Clear prioritisation is necessary to ensure the optimum delivery of service so that there is the least negative effect on student services/delivery of programmes.
- 8.19. UCD has made major progress in moving up the world university rankings in recent years - maintaining that position will be challenging in times of severe financial cuts.

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

Paragraph references below, refer to the relevant paragraphs in the Report text.

### **A. Details of the Unit**

#### Commendations

- 2.4. The Unit has undergone significant changes in the last 4-5 years and this seems to have been managed very successfully with the new structure now well established.
- 2.5. Recent recruitment of staff to UCD HR from outside the education sector has enhanced the skills profile of the Unit and there is a good blend of new and longer serving staff working well together.
- 2.6. All staff encountered during the review process were committed, professional, enthusiastic and motivated. In their contributions to the review process they were open and honest and very engaged with the process.
- 2.7. Within the Unit and the directorates there is a strong sense of team camaraderie - a clear vision of their own mission and how it fits into the overall UCD HR picture and the wider UCD plan.
- 2.8. There appears to be good and open communication within the Unit.
- 2.9. Offices and meeting facilities in Roebuck are to a very high standard and provide a welcoming ambience for all visitors to the facility.
- 2.10. Access to the full suite of current policies, procedures and forms via the UCD HR Website was noted as a very positive development.

#### Recommendations

- 2.11. Review the current staffing numbers across directorates.
- 2.12. Ensure that UCD HR staff have a presence, both formally and informally, on the wider Belfield Campus.

## **B. Governance, Planning and Organisation**

### Commendations

- 3.9. UCD HR has a presence at University Senior Management Team and has representation within many other key teams in Colleges.
- 3.10. UCD HR values are well articulated.
- 3.11. The alignment of HR function with Payroll function is a positive feature.
- 3.12. The planned move of the HR function away from a more transactional Personnel approach some years ago was successful.
- 3.13. The enthusiasm, expertise and dedication of UCD HR staff that the Review Group met.
- 3.14. The fact that development of the UCD HR Strategy is now well under way.

### Recommendations

- 3.15. The UCD Senior Management Team may need to devote specific time to articulating what it wants of the University's staff, agreeing what each manager will do to support agreed changes, and agreeing the resources available for the priorities. This should perhaps be reviewed annually. This will allow UCD HR to ensure its Strategy closely relates both to the explicit needs of the University, and to the often less well defined but essential "emotional" needs of managers and staff.
- 3.16. The HR Directors define the priorities for the initiatives, possibly reducing the number, but ensuring the remainder are delivered to time, cost and specification, and fully meet client expectations: this may also involve very focussed communications.
- 3.17. The UCD HR strategy should be completed as expeditiously as possible, with high levels of client consultation and participation.

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

### ***a. Management and Decision Making Culture***

#### Commendations

- 4.1.1. The Unit is well structured to deliver a range of HR services which are transactional, operational and with some early development of strategic and organisational development capability.
- 4.1.2. There is a strong commitment to collaboration between directorates and the co-location in Roebuck House assists this.

- 4.1.3. While each Director appears to have clear responsibility for specific activities there are mechanisms in place to enable collaborative decision making as a management team.

#### Recommendations

- 4.1.4. Consider whether the current range of UCD HR management meetings are necessary and whether they could be streamlined for greater efficiency without compromising effectiveness of decision making and collaboration.

#### **b. HR Services**

#### Commendations

- 4.2.12. The E-Recruitment tool was viewed favourably by the group of newly appointed staff that met the Review Group. It was described as intuitive and easy to upload an application.
- 4.2.13. Staff reported an improvement in accessing HR policies on the UCD HR website.
- 4.2.14. Automation of timesheets has reduced a significant volume of manual processing.
- 4.2.15. The implementation of *Touchpaper*<sup>6</sup> should enable UCD HR to improve its tracking, reporting and analysis of staff queries, and enable staff to find answers to routine questions using the knowledge base functionality.

#### Recommendations

- 4.2.16. Consider implementing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between HRIS and payroll to clarify roles and responsibilities, eliminate duplication of data entry and/or checking data.
- 4.2.17. Review payroll deadlines in conjunction with the development of an SLA to allow greatest possible flexibility to ensure the efficiency of getting new staff on the payroll without the need for advance payments.
- 4.2.18. Develop a Service Level Agreement with clear timeframes for various parts of the recruitment process to ensure a high quality service to new staff and hiring managers.
- 4.2.19. Review the competing demands on the HRIS team and assess whether the current staffing level and skills profile is adequate.
- 4.2.20. Review the Business Analyst function in order to develop an enhanced business analysis capacity in the HR Strategy area to support management decision making.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Touchpaper* – business support software to enhance service to employees and clients

- 4.2.21. Assess the return on investment of a more significant investment in the development of Core HR to enable efficiency and effectiveness gains and allow a reprioritisation of resources to higher value activities.
- 4.2.22. Ensure there is a comprehensive communication plan to support the launch of *Touchpaper* with clearly articulated service levels in respect of response timeframes, and a commitment to reporting activity levels, and resolution rates to UCD staff.
- 4.2.23. There needs to be more effective co-ordination between the roles and responsibilities of UCD HR Recruitment and UCD Research to facilitate the efficient appointment of post docs. It is important that the UCD policies and procedures on research appointments that have been developed in recent years, are consistently used by all parties.

**c. HR Relationships**

Commendations

- 4.3.6. The introduction of HR Partners is a real success story for UCD HR. There was strong support for the role and value of HR Partners in assisting College Principals and Heads of School and Units to manage people in their areas of responsibility.
- 4.3.7. The HR Partners appear to work effectively as a team and provide professional support for each other, for Schools and for Colleges.
- 4.3.8. There appears to be a co-ordinated approach to providing services to Colleges, with the HR Partners working together to deal with workload peaks and troughs and cover for absences.

Recommendations

- 4.3.9. The Review Group understands that the portfolios of HR Partners are being changed to more evenly distribute them amongst the Colleges and Units, and to provide HR Partner support for units that currently have no one allocated to them. In some cases this is likely to spread the HR Partners more thinly than they currently are, and may result in diminished service to some areas. From a customer service perspective this may be a real challenge for UCD HR.
- 4.3.10. It is desirable to increase the overall level of HR Partner resource; however this may be impossible in the current environment. It is difficult to identify activities or roles in central UCD HR areas that could be reduced or eliminated to fund additional HR Partner resource.
- 4.3.11. Consideration should be given to more clearly defining the role of the HR Partner to ensure that their professional skills are being fully used and represent value for money. Consideration should be given to whether they are spending time on administrative and co-ordination activities that could be undertaken elsewhere or eliminated through process improvement and technology solutions such as improving the use of *AskHR* and *Touchpaper*.

**d. HR Strategy and Development**

Commendations

- 4.4.8. The Review Group heard praise of some of the projects that have been undertaken over the last couple of years including the Research Career Framework and the contribution that HR staff capability brought to this project.
- 4.4.9. New staff and Heads of School Induction Workshops are valued by staff, although there were issues raised regarding the relevance of all components for all attendees.
- 4.4.10. The introduction of coaching and in particular the initiative to develop UCD Coaches is a positive and effective way to support staff development.
- 4.4.11. New staff value induction, but questioned the relevance of some components for all staff.

Recommendations

- 4.4.12. The vacant Organisational Development role needs to be replaced as a high priority to ensure that key projects and developments such as the review of PMDS are well supported, in addition to providing a change management capability to support the many changes occurring throughout the University.
- 4.4.13. The new HR Strategy needs to be based on clarification of UCD Senior Management Team's people strategy and priorities. It needs the visible support of the UCD Senior Management Team and requires consultation with staff across the University to develop UCD staff engagement with the overall objectives and outcomes.
- 4.4.14. Consideration needs to be given to the timing of the Heads of School induction. There is merit in running some modules for incoming Heads as preparation several months before they take up the role.
- 4.4.15. It would be useful for UCD HR to provide evidence for the value of a planned induction, and to develop a framework and checklist for local level induction with guidance for managers.

**e. HR Employee Relations, Equality and Diversity (ER)**

Commendations

- 4.5.5. The Employee Relations Directorate demonstrates a strong understanding of the external legal and public policy context in which the University operates.

## Recommendations

- 4.5.6. There is an urgent need to clarify UCD's philosophy and approach to managing ER issues in the context of its responsibilities as a Public Service employer and under its statutory obligations via the Universities Act. This should include clarifying the tolerance of risk, and extent to which the University will "take on" issues when it is the right thing to do.
- 4.5.7. The Review Group recommends that the HR Directors communicate with managers to clarify information and expectations about the supports that are available for managers, in order to assist them with employee relations issues. To enhance clarity, information about supports should distinguish between support from HR Partners and support from the Employee Relations Directorate, and should outline when issues will be escalated to external/third parties.
- 4.5.8. A clear, documented process for managers to deal with poor performers amongst staff may be usefully supported by development of a Frequently Asked Questions resource and short workshop/briefing that HR Partners can use to inform managers and Heads.
- 4.5.9. In tandem with implementing the above recommendations, the Review Group suggests that consideration be given to clarifying the role of an agreed internal procedure for resolution of disputes. Issues to be addressed could include clarifying when the service should be used and by whom and whether it could be used more effectively for early dispute resolution and lead to a lower number of issues being escalated to external parties.

## **D. Management of Resources**

### **a. Finance**

## Commendations

- 5.4.2. The VP for Staff and HR Directors appear to have a professional and structured approach to financial management. They are currently planning a three year financial view, and on a weekly basis have a finance meeting that replicates the University-wide finance meeting.
- 5.4.3. UCD HR has played a key role in implementing a range of cost saving initiatives to assist the University to manage in the current economic climate. These include the Shorter Working Year and Career Break options.

## Recommendation

- 5.4.4. The Review Group recommends that project close out processes and post-implementation reviews need to critically assess the impact (and efficiency gains) on workloads, potential for savings in time and therefore capacity to resource other activities.

**b. ITS/MIS**

Commendations

5.5.2. There is a visible commitment to automation of processes to improve the user experience e.g. *e-Recruitment*, and to providing reports to support management decision making.

Recommendations

5.5.3. Development of an agreed Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Finance and HRIS in relation to the working relationship and provision of reports would assist with efficiency and effectiveness of processes.

5.5.4. The issue of data integrity needs to be more clearly understood in order to find a solution that ensures data quality. Issues such as which data is problematic and reasons for the problems need to be addressed (e.g. whether problems are definitional and/or data entry and quality assurance issues).

5.5.5. Projects and initiatives need to be prioritised so that HRIS efforts can focus on the most important, high value work. If projects are de-scoped as part of this process there needs to be clear communication with those who will be impacted upon, outlining the reasons for the change in priorities.

**c. Communications**

Commendations

5.6.5. There are a variety of internal communication channels to keep UCD HR staff informed and connected with each other. Effective use of these may reduce the need for some face-to-face meetings.

Recommendations

5.6.6. As identified in the SAR, it would be useful to tailor communications for specific audiences to ensure their information needs are being met in a relevant way.

5.6.7. The role of the UCD HR Communications team should be developed to include assessment of communication mechanisms/channels and co-ordination of UCD HR communications and messages with the University community.

5.6.8. The Unit should consider whether there are effective, low cost and appropriate ways to communicate UCD HR activities and inform the wider UCD community about the various roles and people within UCD HR.

5.6.9. Consider having an agreed protocol whereby significant and sensitive communications from UCD HR are previewed (for tone, clarity, etc) by a small number of users for feedback before being sent out more widely.

## **E. User Perspective**

### Commendations

- 6.17. UCD HR sought a variety of users' views in developing the SAR.
- 6.18. Experienced HR staff, some with recent industry experience, bring a good client focus.
- 6.19. There are many good reports of HR Partners' effectiveness, and their ability to help managers gain access to the "right" person in central UCD HR – this was particularly reported from middle and junior managers.

### Recommendations

- 6.20. The apparent disconnect between UCD HR and some senior academic managers needs to be addressed urgently, to assess if UCD HR really meets their priorities. This should include discussion on attitudes to risk. There should be consideration of introducing a simple risk matrix in communications and decision-making processes.
- 6.21. The perceived role and alleged bias (toward the employee) of Employee Relations should be examined and UCD HR may need to consider how best to present the reality of current procedures to managers. In the longer term, there should be a review of the effectiveness of the voluntary resort to external bodies.
- 6.22. The absence of any plans for staff attitude surveys and client satisfaction surveys should be addressed quickly: there are now a variety of inexpensive software resources available to allow a lower cost solution.
- 6.23. The Performance element of PMDS should be reviewed, and strengthened appropriately for Academic users. The issue of who the reviewer is should also be clarified. The balance of obtaining trade union consensus and ensuring fitness for purpose should be critically reviewed. PMDS links to Workload Models should be clear, where appropriate.
- 6.24. There should be consideration of the need for training both HR Partners and key corporate UCD HR staff in influencing and consultancy skills, to ensure line managers are more aware of the complexities of their HR issues and that UCD HR staff are well equipped to offer the maximum flexibility within organisational, financial and legal constraints. This training will also help to enable all UCD HR staff deliver a more consistent approach, and reduce perceptions that UCD HR service quality varies depending on the individual.

## **F. Management of Quality and Enhancement**

### Commendations

- 7.5. UCD HR has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the SAR provides evidence of examples of improvement initiatives, e.g. projects such as Online Time

Sheets and the soon-to-be-launched Online Pensions Information have been developed, both to improve in-house procedures and also out of user-defined need.

- 7.6. UCD HR has an ambitious programme of work for 2011 relative to its available resources.
- 7.7. As described in the SAR and evidenced in the Review Group meetings with Directors and the VP for Staff, UCD HR understands the value of having a structured approach to SLAs, KPIs and Benchmarking, in order to support delivery of professional services.
- 7.8. New initiatives, such as the case tracking metrics in HR Relationships, are an excellent development and will provide a platform for further developments
- 7.9. In developing new metrics in this area, UCD HR sees a unique opportunity to take a lead at the national level.

#### Recommendations

- 7.10. Measuring and reporting on the impact of continuous improvement initiatives in a clear, concise and consistent way to the University community, would enable staff to understand more clearly what UCD HR does, and the value of the unit's improvement activities.
- 7.11. There should be a focus on developing SLAs to clarify expectations and customer service standards.
- 7.12. The Review Group recommends caution when developing HR KPIs, to ensure that they not only focus on inputs but also on outputs, impact and links to UCD strategic priorities.

## **Appendix 1**

### **UCD Human Resources Response to the Review Group Report**

UCD HR welcomes the Quality Review Report. Staff in HR fully participated in the review and we would like to thank the wide range of staff of the university that provided their feedback as part of the self assessment process and during the reviewer site visit.

The commendations and recommendations in the Quality Review Report, along with the wealth of information gathered through the Self-Assessment process will provide an excellent framework for UCD HR in developing our Quality Improvement Plan to run in parallel with our strategic planning cycle.

We would like to thank the Review Group for their time and given the challenges facing both the unit and the university, we welcome in particular the commendation they gave for the hard work, professionalism and motivation of all staff in the unit and for their acknowledgement of the increasing impact of public policy measures on the work of the unit.

## Appendix 2 – Schedule for Review Group Visit



### Schedule for Review Visit

#### UCD Human Resources

**11-14 April 2011**

#### **Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit: Monday, 11 April 2011**

- 17.00-18.45 Review Group meet at hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following three days - **RG and UCD Quality Office only**
- 19.00 Dinner for the Review Group - **RG and UCD Quality Office only**

#### **Day 1: Tuesday, 12 April**

**Venue: UCD Belfield House**

- 08.30-09.30 Private meeting of Review Group
- 09.30-10.15 Review Group meet with Head of Unit: **Vice-President for Staff**
- 10.15-10.30 Break
- 10.30-11.30 Review Group meet with **Vice-President for Staff and HR Directors**
- 11.30-11.45 Coffee Break
- 11.45-12.45 Review Group meet with **Self-assessment Report Co-ordinating Committee**
- 12.45-13.30 Lunch – Review Group only
- 13.30-14.30 Review Group meet with **College Principals**
- 14.30-14.40 Break
- 14.40-15.40 Review Group meet with **Heads of School**

15.40-16.00	Coffee Break
16.00-16.45	Review Group meet with representatives of <b>UCD Senior Management Team</b>
16.45-16.50	Break
16.50-17.45	Review Group meet with <b>Heads of Units</b>
17.45-18.15	Review Group meet to review key observations
18.15	Review Group Depart

**Day 2: Wednesday, 13 April**

**Venue: UCD Belfield House**

08.30-09.00	Private meeting of Review Group
09.00-09.40	Review Group meet with <b>HR Group 1 (representatives from 4 Directorates)</b>
09.40-09.45	Break
09.45-10.20	Review Group meet with <b>HR Group 2 (representatives from HR Partners)</b>
10.20-11.00	<b>Coffee Break</b> and Review Group meet to review key observations
11.00-11.40	Review Group meet with a <b>representative group of members of academic staff</b>
11.40-11.45	Break
11.45-12.30	Review Group meet with a <b>representative group of members of administrative and technical staff</b>
12.30-13.15	Lunch – Review Group only
13.15-14.00	Review Group meet with a <b>representative group of newly appointed staff</b> (including researchers, post docs, early career academics and support staff)
14.00-14.15	Break
14.15-14.35	Meeting with <b>IFUT representative</b> (participants representing other main UCD staff Unions chose to withdraw from this meeting due to perceived conflict of interest with Review Group membership)
14.35-14.55	Meeting with <b>UCD HR Director, HR Services</b>
14.55-15.15	Meeting with <b>UCD HR Director, Employee Relations, Equality &amp; Diversity</b>
15.15-15.35	Meeting with <b>UCD HR Director, Strategy and Development</b>

15.35-15.50	Coffee Break
15.50-16.45	Private meeting of Review Group to review findings
16.45-17.30	Tour of UCD HR facilities
17.45	Review Group departs

**Day 3: Thursday, 14 April**

**Venue: UCD Belfield House**

08.30-09.15	Review Group private meeting
09.15-09.45	Review Group meet with <b>Head of Unit</b> to sweep-up/clarify any outstanding issues
09.45-11.00	Review Group prepare first draft of Review Group Report and extract key <u>provisional</u> points of commendation and recommendations for improvement for exit presentation
11.00-11.20	Coffee Break
11.20-13.00	(Optional) Review Group meet with unit or University staff to clarify outstanding issues or continue to prepare draft Review Group Report
13.00-13.45	Lunch – Review Group only
13.45-15.00	Review Group finalise first draft of Review Group Report and prepare exit presentation – and confirm arrangements/deadline for Review Group completion
15.00-15.15	Coffee Break
15.15-15.30	Review Group meet with <b>Head of Unit</b> to feedback outline strengths and recommendations on areas for further development

**Venue – Engineering Building Room 234**

15.30-15.45	Transfer to venue for exit presentation
15.45-16.15	Exit presentation to all available UCD HR staff – to be made by an external member of the Review Group (or other member of the Review Group, as agreed) summarising the key findings of the Review Group
16.15	Review Site Visit ends – Review Group departs