



University College Dublin

Periodic Quality Review

UCD IT Services

February 2015

Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 20 October 2015

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Executive Summary - Key Findings of the Review Group

The Review Group was satisfied that UCD IT Services is performing well, notwithstanding the impact of the current financial constraints under which it is operating.

Examples of good practice

- ITS provides an excellent service, despite staff shortages and budget cuts.
- ITS has good leadership and a well organised team structure.
- Communication within the unit has improved.
- Service Centres are well organised and provide effective points of contact with customers.
- ITS brokering strategy is good.

Key recommendations for future improvement

The full list of recommendations is set out in Chapter 7, however, the Review Group would suggest that the following be prioritised:

- Improve the links between IT Services and IT professionals in other UCD schools and units.
- Improve cyber security.
- Implement a clear IT governance framework.
- Increase engagement with Educational Technologists and UCD Teaching and Learning and engage in a review of long-term platforms and approaches to teaching.

1. Introduction and Overview of UCD IT Services

Introduction

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of IT Services, University College Dublin, which was undertaken on 2-5 February 2015. The UCD IT Services response to the Review Group Report is attached as Appendix 1.

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 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, 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 developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:

- To monitor the quality of the student experience.
- To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice, and to identify challenges and how to address these.
- To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
- To encourage the development and enhancement of these systems, in the context of current and emerging provision.
- To inform the University's strategic planning process.
- The process provides an external benchmark on practice.
- 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 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 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

- 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.

1.5 The composition of the Review Group UCD IT Services was as follows:

- Dr Gethin McBean, UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science (Chair)
- Mr Eamonn O'Neill, UCD Bursar's Office (Deputy Chair)
- Dr Seán Duffy, University of Birmingham, UK (Extern)
- Mr Ted Dodds, Cornell University, USA (Extern)

1.6 The Review Group visited the Unit from 2-5 February 2015 and held meetings with IT Services staff; UCD students and staff; external stakeholders; and the SAR Co-ordinating Committee. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 2.

1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation provided by IT Services and the University during the site visit.

Preparation of the Self-assessment Report (SAR)

1.8 Following a briefing from the UCD Quality Officer a QA/QI Working Group was established in March 2014 comprising staff members who were representative of all IT Services units and of all grades. The members of the QA/QI Working Group were:

- Seamus Shaw, Chief Technology Officer (Chair)
- Julia Gustafsson (to August 2014) (Secretary)
- Irene Kearney (September 2014 onwards) (Secretary)
- Ciara Acton, Head of Customer Services
- Tom Cannon, Data Centre Officer
- Fred Clarke, Head of Research IT (September 2014 onwards)
- Genevieve Dalton, Chief Services Officer
- Joyce Downey, Management Services Project Leader
- Anthony Grenham, Networks Team Leader
- Kate Griffin, Head of IT Administration

- Fergal Hynes, Student Union President
- Olivia Jackman, Communications Officer (to August 2014)
- Andrew Kearney, Customer Services Supervisor
- John Matthews, Media Services AV Specialist
- Maria McDonald, Head of Management Information Services
- Brian Morrissey, Head of Web Services
- Sinead O'Rourke, Acting Communications Officer (September 2014 onwards)
- Winnie Ryan, Research IT Team Leader (to August 2014)
- Eoin Wickham, Systems & Storage Team Leader

1.9 Meetings of the Working Group were held on a regular basis over a period of 10 months. Tasks and timelines were agreed and allocated across members of the group, and subgroups were established to ensure timely progress against the project plan. The areas of responsibility of each of these subgroups were:

- Editorial
- Communication
- Data Collection

1.10 The Working Group met regularly to review progress and receive updates from each of the subgroups.

1.11 As part of the self-assessment preparations all UCD IT Services staff were given the opportunities to take part in the process, including:

- An open and standing invitation to attend meetings of the QA/QI Working Group was issued to all IT Services staff
- Workshops were held for IT Services staff to seek feedback and input
- Updates were provided to IT Services staff via the IT Services Community on Google+
- An internal staff survey was undertaken
- Documents, minutes, and drafts of the SAR were made available to all staff for comment

The University

1.12 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origins date back to 1854. The University is situated on a large modern campus about 4 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.

1.13 The University Strategic Plan (to 2020) states that the University's mission is: "to contribute to the flourishing of Dublin, Ireland, Europe and the world through the excellence and impact of our research and scholarship, the quality of our graduates and our global engagement; providing a supportive community in which every member of the University is enabled to achieve their full potential".

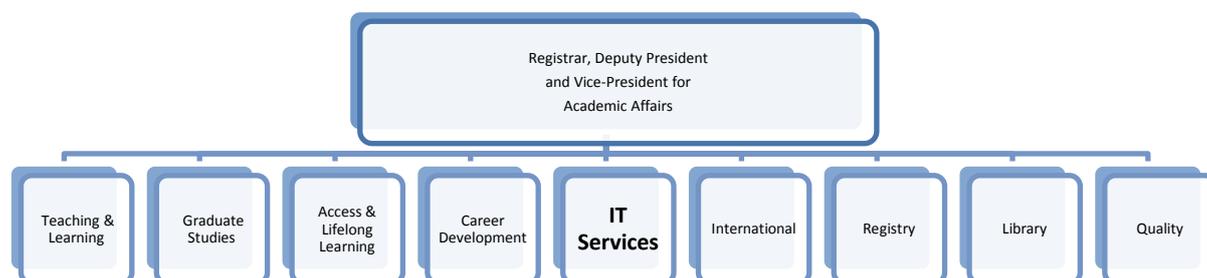
The University is currently organised into 38 schools in seven colleges¹:

- 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

1.14 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture, Veterinary, Arts, Law, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 26,000 students in our UCD campus (approximately 16,300 undergraduates, 7,800 postgraduates and 2,200 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on over 70 University degree programmes, including over 6,300 international students from more than 121 countries. The University also has over 5,400 students studying UCD degree courses on campuses overseas.

UCD IT Services

1.15 IT Services is one of the largest of the nine Support Units within the Office of the Registrar, Deputy President and Vice- President for Academic Affairs.



1.16 The scope of services delivered by UCD IT Services includes academic & administrative systems, research IT, teaching & learning technologies and web services. The range of customers served includes current & retired staff (including adjuncts), prospective and current students, as well as alumni and visitors and other affiliates.

¹ This reflects the University structure at the time of the review, however, the University structures will be re-organised in September 2015.

- 1.17 IT Services management divisions report to the Chief Technology Officer. They include:
- Operational & Customer Services, comprising Technical Services and Customer Services
 - Planning and Service Development, comprising Web Services, Research IT, Teaching and Learning IT & Media Services
 - Management Services
 - IT Administration
- 1.18 As of November 2014, IT Services have a headcount of 87 staff (including vacancies). IT Services are spread across four locations on the Belfield Campus: Computer Centre; Tierney Building; James Joyce Library Building, and Daedalus, along with a number of IT centres strategically located across the campus.

2. Highlights and key achievements

- 2.1 Drawing from both the information presented in the Self-assessment Report (SAR) and discussions during the site visit, the Review Group (RG) was impressed at how UCD IT Services (ITS) is managing to provide an effective service in an austere operating environment. High staff attrition has resulted in staff shortages that have increased the workload of the existing workforce. Budgetary constraints hinder the Unit's flexibility to respond effectively to advances in information technology and a rapidly changing user environment. Senior management in IT Services is clear on the direction of the strategic development of the Unit and the Review Group was impressed by the achievements to date in this regard. However, it was evident that less senior staff in many cases are not sufficiently aware of the strategic priorities of the Unit. It is recommended that the Unit engages in discussion/information distribution with a wider cohort of staff more frequently than is current practice, so that all divisions and team members are well informed of opportunities and priorities for development.
- 2.2 IT Services has made several key achievements that are indicative of a well-run and forward-looking unit. The following list provides some examples of recent achievements; in many cases, a more detailed analysis of the outcomes and commendations/recommendations is provided in subsequent sections of this Report.

The Gmail migration

- 2.2.1 In 2013, ITS concluded the transition of all UCD staff mail to Google. The roll-out of the service took five months and local support was available throughout this period. Benefits for UCD staff include a seven-fold increase in each customer's quota, over 180TB of storage and improved smartphone synchronisation.

InfoHub

- 2.2.2 InfoHub is a portal to a wide range of services enabling UCD staff to manage all aspects of their academic and administrative responsibilities. Key services provided

by InfoHub include data analytics and reporting, targeted communications, a facility for conducting online surveys, an online booking system, access to online forms, a customer relationship management (CRM) capability for tracking student-oriented services and a system for electronic payments.

Enhancing the eLearning environment

- 2.2.3 The Teaching and Learning IT division provides a range of services that are designed to facilitate the teaching and learning activities of staff and students. These include the virtual learning environment, content capture technologies, software application delivery and opportunities for end-user training. Enhancing elearning through collaboration with UCD Teaching and Learning and school-based education technologists is particularly noteworthy.

Communication

- 2.2.4 The Review Group noted that IT Services management has significantly increased the quality of communication within IT Services and the appreciation of this positive development was openly expressed across the spectrum of staff in the unit. Increased use of Google+ as a vehicle for inter-IT Services communication received numerous positive comments from staff. However, there are instances in which communication between members of the IT Services Executive Team and their respective divisions could be improved, for instance by increasing the frequency of meetings with all team members and opportunities for face-to-face meetings with senior staff of the division (see also 2.10 and 3.17).
- 2.2.5 It is evident that IT Services is intent on increasing opportunities for dialogue between its members and other units within the University (see also 6.2). To that end, IT Services, together with UCD Library and UCD Registry, hosted a one day **Work Smarter Together** event in March 2014. The Review Group congratulates IT Services on their engagement with this initiative, but cautions that greater clarity in regard to key objectives, resolutions and outcomes would be beneficial for all parties in achieving real progress in collaborative projects. In the same vein, the Review Group encourages IT Services to organise a series of end-user focus groups (for example, academic staff, educational technologists and students) in order to improve on the level of feedback of key systems, such as InfoHub and Blackboard.

Buildings and Facilities

- 2.2.6 In general, staff are satisfied with their working environment. The space in the two main locations (Computer Centre and Daedalus) is fit-for-purpose and offices in the Computer Centre have been recently configured for a more open-plan working environment. Space in the James Joyce Library Building, occupied by Media Services, is unsuitable for the current requirements of the division and end-users. The Review Group concurs with the IT Services plan to move Media Services to the Computer Centre, which will improve staff integration and facilitate opportunities

for engagement of Media Services in collaborative projects with other cohorts of staff in IT Services.

Customer services

2.2.7 The Review Group visited IT Services locations in the Computer Centre, Daedalus Building and James Joyce Library Building, as well as a support centre in Health Sciences. It is evident that the support centres are well set-up to cater for customer assistance and that they meet the demands of the customers, in terms of technical services. The James Joyce Library and Health Sciences Centre each contain a facility for the loan of laptops, for which there is high demand amongst students.

The Self-assessment Report (SAR)

2.3 The IT Services SAR, whilst highlighting key achievements of IT Services, did not present a strong objective analysis of the Unit's performance, as the majority of analytical data was confined to the appendices. Much of the data presented in the SAR was therefore anecdotal rather than analytical. It would benefit IT Services to develop the capacity to engage in deeper analysis of user surveys/feedback. A more analytical and objective evaluation of user satisfaction with the Unit, would develop an evidence-base for action and feed into planning and reporting in the future.

2.4 A small number of IT Services staff raised the concern that the SAR did not express the full range of their opinions. However, following direct discussion with ITS staff and review of documentation provided to the Group, the Review Group was satisfied that the breadth of staff views is represented in the SAR & appendices.

Commendations

2.5 Good leadership, well organised team structure.

2.6 IT Services is providing an excellent service despite significant staff shortages and budget cuts.

2.7 Improved communication amongst staff (e.g. Google+, more frequent meetings).

2.8 Service centres are well organised and provide effective contact points with customers.

2.9 User support is highly-regarded and responsive.

Recommendations

2.10 Increase the frequency of meetings between members of the Executive Team and their respective divisions.

- 2.11 Inform all staff of decisions in regard to strategic priorities that have been made at team level.
- 2.12 Consolidate more divisions (for example, Media Services) across two locations – Computer Centre and Daedalus Building.
- 2.13 Organise a series of focus groups to determine customer views on services provided by IT Services.
- 2.14 Develop the capacity to analyse and use data more effectively.

3. Planning, Organisation and Management

- 3.1 IT Services functions in an operating environment that is characterised by significant and long-term resource constraints, coupled with persistent increases in demand for new and better services, systems, and infrastructure. The Review Group acknowledges that all units within UCD are grappling with resource constraints, but most are not dealing with the incessant growth in expectations for new services as are evident in the information technologies domain.

IT Governance

- 3.2 Within such an environment, the need for clarity in IT priority setting, resource allocation, and outcome assessment is of particular importance. This need is typically addressed through IT governance – a set of structures and processes designed to clarify how decisions are made and how members of the community can participate and advocate for their needs. Several years ago there were a number of UCD committees and steering groups that discussed IT issues, though it is not clear that they were effective. More recently, the financial environment has made forward- planning difficult, though this too is changing with the re-introduction of multi-year budgets, after a period when it was difficult to look ahead more than a year at a time.
- 3.3 The IT Services SAR identified a number of IT working groups that are currently operational. However, these do not comprise a robust and coherent system of governance. Consequently, there is inconsistent understanding among stakeholders about how IT priorities are set and how they can engage in the priority setting process. This lack of clarity was expressed most clearly - though not exclusively - in relation to information systems, where it appears that some functional units (e.g., Registry, Finance, and others) are regularly engaged in a dialogue with IT Services around priorities and work plans. That level of close interaction was not as clearly evident with colleges and schools. The Review Group does not view this as a deliberate attempt to include some and exclude others. Rather, it is an almost inevitable feature of the lack of broader IT governance. (See also 6.17).
- 3.4 Governance is also important in the eLearning space where there is a clear requirement for a contemporary vision and a well-articulated model of how the various campus groups

interact. A small number of schools have hired their own educational technology staff to address local eLearning needs, while most have not, either due to a lack of resources or different strategic priorities. It is a matter of some urgency that the staff and resources available within colleges and those available centrally be set up for success by optimally aligning the skills, roles, and responsibilities of each in fulfilling the University's educational mission. The aim of this is to avoid a top-down approach while building an effective and energetic community of practice in eLearning.

Service Brokering and Systems Architecture

- 3.5 IT Services has a clear strategic direction to the adoption of “brokering” rather than building systems. The unit has made good progress as illustrated by the move to Google mail/calendaring, managed hosting of Blackboard, and other examples. IT Services continues to pursue opportunities to engage external services (cloud or other) as a means of gaining scale economies, improved business continuity and information security, and overall efficiencies in operationally critical functions. This strategic direction is consistent with those found in many leading universities in the UK and USA. Although the speed of adoption of cloud services will vary, based on the particular legislative constraints and market opportunities in the different countries, the Review Group encourages UCD and IT Services to continue building on this strategy.
- 3.6 InfoHub was highlighted as an example of a system that has been extremely effective in meeting the information reporting needs of some members of the community (principally those units who are closely aligned with IT Services's Management Services Unit as noted above). Some other units, who are “outside” the direct communications loop, do not view InfoHub as favourably and do not see it as effectively and responsively meeting their local information needs.
- 3.7 The architectural strategy for InfoHub is based on a set of components or modules that are reusable in meeting different business needs. A simple example of this would be credit card processing where there is one module that performs this function wherever it is needed. An architecture of reusable components and standard integration technologies should help IT Services to pursue its brokering strategy when, for instance, the opportunity arises to move a system to the cloud. For instance, the Core HR system could to move to the cloud with a minimum (though probably still significant) effort to integrate the new cloud service into the remaining system components of InfoHub. However, the component architecture approach also necessitates a shift in the nature and demand for particular IT skills. There is much less need for deep software programming skills and much greater need for skills such as integration, data architecture, and vendor management. For any highly technical staff this shift in skills needs can be a difficult transition, but one that is inevitable. It is also likely to improve rather than degrade the in-demand market skills of staff.
- 3.8 The application architecture approach does not seem to be well understood by all staff in the Management Services Unit. Moreover, the Review Group perceives a risk in the form of over-reliance upon one key individual who understands the architecture of InfoHub. Greater

communication within the division, across all levels, should ameliorate the lack of understanding of the architectural strategy.

Blackboard and eLearning at UCD

- 3.9 There is widespread but not universal dislike of Blackboard among UCD academic staff. It is difficult to tease out the specific reasons for this, though it appears to be mostly about the usability of the system, not its lack of reliability (although there was some discussion about plug-ins not working properly). Inadequate academic staff training may exacerbate the poor perception of the system's usability.
- 3.10 Alternative systems, notably Moodle, are in active use within some schools where local support is available. Students could easily become confused by the need to access different course management systems if they are enrolled in cross-disciplinary courses. While Blackboard may not adequately meet the widely varying needs of UCD's academic community, it is unlikely that any single system will be satisfactory for everyone.
- 3.11 In the medium-term, system needs should be reviewed in the context of the dynamic marketplace of course management systems. Meanwhile, some short-term tactical improvements can be made to make Blackboard a more effective tool for more academic staff than is the case today.

Commendations

- 3.12 IT Services' brokering strategy is entirely appropriate. The Review Group encourages UCD and IT Services to continue building on this strategy.
- 3.13 An architecture approach is appropriate and consistent with expected market trends in the IT industry as well as other leading institutions in other countries.
- 3.14 There is an existing plan to develop an integrated approach to eLearning.
- 3.15 Leaders of IT Services and UCD Teaching and Learning have a strong relationship and are committed to providing a seamless experience for academic staff without confusion about organisational structures and responsibilities.

Recommendations

- 3.16 UCD should develop an IT governance framework, within the wider University governance, with appropriate structures and processes. This should be linked to year-on-year planning and resource allocation. The structure should enable engagement from units, roles, and levels across the University (though not an exhaustively representative sample in all groups), and provide transparency of plans/commitments to Schools/Departments (see also 6.17). Examples are readily accessible through other university websites or direct conversation with CIOs.

- 3.17 The Review Group recommends more frequent multi-level meetings within MSU, along with more one-to-one time for staff with the Director.
- 3.18 Provide sufficient cross-training to reduce the risk of over-reliance on a single individual with comprehensive knowledge of the InfoHub architecture.
- 3.19 In partnership with UCD Teaching and Learning, develop an eLearning “community of practice” including colleges and ITS. The goal should be to maximise opportunities for collaboration, communication, understanding, reduce duplication, and ensure optimal resources are applied to the educational mission of UCD.
- 3.20 Assess UCD’s broad needs for a course management system and evaluate products (including new versions of Blackboard that have improved usability) to set an IT architectural direction for the next 3-5 years.
- 3.21 In the short-term, IT Services should review Blackboard with a view to making some minor developments that would enhance its effectiveness as a tool for academic staff end-users.
- 3.22 Meanwhile, gather feedback from school educational technologists and academic staff directly, about shortcomings (this could be one or two half-day workshops) and develop a short-term roadmap to address the critical problems while the larger review is underway.

4. Functions, Activities and Processes

- 4.1 IT Services runs a set of operational procedures which together deliver a reliable and responsive range of services, for which customer satisfaction is high. The cloud-based service management platform (Service-Now), through the 3rd-party outsourced helpdesk provider, is a robust and highly capable platform for service delivery, using the adopted Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) set of IT service procedures.
- 4.2 The various technical elements of infrastructure service delivery (network, servers, data centres) are managed within the relevant sub-teams of IT Services. However, there is no centralised monitoring capability, location, or resource which brings all of these together into a coherent ‘heads-up’ on the operational services.
- 4.3 Regarding information security, there are two dedicated staff posts handling security incidents and managing the various protection and detection technologies. However, information security or the cyber threat (from criminal, activist, or state-sponsored IP theft) are not recognised on the IT risk register, and therefore have no visibility to University leadership.
- 4.4 IT Services provides a spectrum of support for high performance computing (HPC), ranging from facilitating access to national shared HPC services, Irish Centre for High-End Computing (ICHEC), through local services (Sonic), to assistance and advice for academic units who are managing their own local HPC.

- 4.5 UCD utilises the option from Dell of a standard image – which is used by IT Services and Library for provision of new desktops and laptops.

Commendations

- 4.6 IT Services delivers a range of high availability core services, with customers appreciating the robustness, capacity and availability of these.
- 4.7 The end-user support process is highly regarded, providing in general exceptionally responsive action (often same-day) to address user issues and requests. IT Services staff are regarded as knowledgeable, helpful and willing to go the extra mile to assist staff and student users.
- 4.8 Departments using HPC services are broadly happy with the volume and quality of HPC provision and support – a strong achievement given the reduced resources available.
- 4.9 External service providers find IT Services as an organisation: fair, reasonable, knowledgeable, demanding of high service quality (without being irrational), and very open to best practice suggestions.

Recommendations

- 4.10 IT Services should continue ITIL process adoption across the Unit, with encouragement in the short-term to focus on the Service Catalogue (and the associated cost understanding per service) and on strengthening Incident Management and escalation processes.
- 4.11 A review of infrastructure operations should be undertaken, to consider the opportunity of bringing together the network, server, storage, data centre operations consoles into a shared area – thereby enabling a holistic, connected oversight of service delivery, and enabling more responsiveness for incident management.
- 4.12 The IT risk register should be expanded to include information security and cyber risks. It may be appropriate to increase the security team resources, and to undertake a cyber-self-assessment (e.g. the UK's FTSE 350 Questionnaire). It may also be appropriate to review the security protections for sensitive information on mobile devices (e.g. email downloading, where this could include personal information), including provision of additional advice for end-users.
- 4.13 With very limited HPC staff resources, IT Services will struggle to support any expansion of HPC use in other schools or using other software platforms. Any step change growth in HPC use by academics may need to be accompanied by associated additional technical staff resources in IT Services – possibly funded through research grants.
- 4.14 Recognising the increasingly global nature of university activities and expansion of the 'working day' for staff and students beyond the normal Monday to Friday 9-5 operation, IT

Services should keep under review its hours of service and increase from 6 am – 12 pm, 364 days per year (for the front-facing helpdesk services). Users generally seemed satisfied with the timing and frequency of scheduled maintenance windows.

- 4.15 The wider external market for IT staff means there is a heightened possibility of staff departing (see also 5.2). For a number of areas, the levels of documentation appear to be insufficient to ensure that divisions are protected from ‘knowledge-loss’ should staff members leave. This is particularly a risk for application development (MSU). The creation and maintenance of up-to-date documentation should be made part of normal development and service processes, with every project and every technical change resulting from an incident/request being required to complete its documentation before formal closure.
- 4.16 As UCD continues its ‘brokering services’ strategy and adopts more and more cloud services, IT Services should explore with its 3rd-party helpdesk provider how it can interact directly (on UCD’s behalf) with other service providers to optimise the response to incidents and requests.
- 4.17 The option of providing a ‘managed desktop’ service for staff should be explored again – allowing the provision of ‘zero touch’ (by IT Services) of new devices, and the remote software provision to, and diagnosis and repair of standard machines. Initially this may be targeted at central services users rather than academic users.

5. Management of Resources

- 5.1 Overall, the Review Group was impressed by the results and the quality of services provided by ITS relative to the level of staff and other resources. The percentage of institutional revenue allocated to IT Services (2.7%) is well below the level one might reasonably expect to find at a leading research university, especially one with a medical school. IT Services is a relatively early adopter of cloud services as a means of lowering the marginal cost of services while maintaining appropriate quality.

Talent Management and “IT@UCD”

- 5.2 In addition to operating in a highly resource-constrained environment, IT Services faces an acute challenge to its workforce due to the presence in Dublin of global IT companies such as Google and Facebook. Some IT staff have left the University for employment in the corporate sector and there will be continued allure - typically for the most highly qualified staff - to work in what are perceived as highly innovative firms. Regulatory constraints on the ability of IT Services leadership to reallocate staff based on changing needs and market limitations constrain the ability to move to cloud services (though good progress has been made).
- 5.3 Overall, UCD and IT Services are facing the same challenges as other leading universities in transforming to the skills and organisational structures that are most effective today and tomorrow. Skills and roles that were foundational to IT support in the past (e.g. desktop

support, server management) are not required in the same abundance or in the same model due to advances in managed desktop support (often contracted and/or heavily automated) and cloud services. Conversely, new skills such as vendor and contract management, data architecture, analytics and business intelligence, business process redesign, cyber-security, among others, are in much greater demand at UCD (and in the Review Group externs' institutions) than are available. In short, managing IT talent during this period of unprecedented change needs to be a top priority for ITS leadership.

- 5.4 For example, both Cornell and Harvard have defined IT career frameworks that help address some of these challenges, though for these and other universities, it remains a work in progress. Harvard coined the term "T shaped" as part of their vision of the current/future IT professional. The "T" shaped IT professional has some deep skills (vertical) coupled with a broad view of service delivery (horizontal). Cornell has invested heavily in recent years in IT leadership development with the result of a growing cohort of IT staff from all parts of campus who speak the same language, have interacted with one another and with their peers at other leading universities, and who are gradually taking on leadership roles to positively impact the culture and development of excellence in their profession.
- 5.5 The Review Group was surprised to observe the lack of clarity about how many IT staff resources UCD actually has, who do not work within the IT Services unit. The SAR focuses on IT Services' 87 staff but is largely silent on staff in other units, specifically in colleges. The RG received widely varying answers to the question of how many non- IT Services staff are performing IT functions elsewhere, ranging from 12 to 100. It is difficult to build a community, perhaps to be known as "IT@UCD", without knowing all the members of that community. Similarly, it is hard to manage IT talent and career development with optimal effect, if some number of people are excluded from the perceived count of IT staff. It is appreciated that IT Services would need direct assistance from UCD HR to identify IT staff working in other areas of UCD.

Capital Allocation to Sustain Critical Infrastructure

- 5.6 In the aftermath of the recent recession, educational institutions around the world have wrestled with deferred maintenance on their critical infrastructure. There is always more demand for capital replacement than there are capital funds to do so. UCD faces some important decision points around several of its critical pieces of IT infrastructure, notably the data centres and the campus network. Currently, IT Services operate two data centres, both on campus. Both Data Centres have been invested in, however, one of them is based in the Computer Centre, a building that is at variance with the Campus Development Plan, and potentially falls within the footprint of an expanded Science North Complex. The capital cost to replace or rebuild this data centre is unlikely to be feasible in the current financial environment. Moreover, the need for individual campuses to invest in their own data centres is increasingly open to question.

Media Services and the eLearning Community

- 5.7 There is a challenging transition underway as the Media Services group develops within the overall IT Services organisation. The general view of educational technologists in UCD colleges is that a one-size-fits-all model for media and content creation is unrealistic. Different UCD colleges have different needs in terms of quality, time-to-market, and academic culture. The pilot audio/video “booth” in Daedalus constitutes an example of the type of studio space needed by those academic units who see the need, though as that model is refined the Review Group would encourage higher quality audio than is available in the pilot booth. A large and sophisticated media studio space does not seem to be a priority requirement. Rather, a handful of these booth-sized studios combined with on-location video shoots seems to be a good balance for current and future needs.

Commendations

- 5.8 Impressive results in a highly resource-constrained environment.
- 5.9 Good progress in adoption of cloud services as opportunities arise.
- 5.10 Vision of reallocating IT resources from operations to mission.

Recommendations

- 5.11 Increase and expand IT Services’ efforts in talent management in order to develop a better mix of contemporary skills and roles for the IT challenges of today and tomorrow.
- 5.11.1 Create a community involving the full cohort of IT professionals such as “IT@UCD”, deepening links between IT Services and staff associated with other units who are engaged in providing IT service.
- 5.11.2 Consider the development of an IT career framework that reflects the specific needs of UCD but which can be modelled on similar frameworks at other universities.
- 5.11.3 Invest in leadership skills (so called “soft” skills) for more IT staff.
- 5.11.4 Develop and maintain a current listing of all IT and IT-related staff at UCD, no matter where their home unit.
- 5.12 Integrate the Media Services division into the mainstream of other staff and groups involved in eLearning developments. Review and update the division’s mandate in light of contemporary approaches to media development and support.
- 5.13 Continue to pursue, evolve, and learn from the pilot A/V booths in partnership with college-based educational technologists in order to optimise value and minimise the cost and space requirements.

- 5.14 It is important that UCD leadership recognise the increasingly urgent need for capital investment in critical infrastructure.
- 5.15 Continue to explore as the preferred option, moving the work currently done in the on campus data centres, to cloud infrastructure-as-a-service offerings.

6. User Perspective

- 6.1 Like other units in UCD, IT Services has operated in a very difficult financial environment for a number of years. Replacement lifecycles and capital investment in equipment have been below the levels that would be desired and this represents a risk for the future. IT Services has recognised a gap in its communications with users and is putting in place a new role – IT Relationship Manager – to supplement existing roles and to provide an improved interface between senior members of the academic community and IT Services staff. Similar roles exist in UCL and Aberdeen where they have been successful. While in its early stages, this seems to be a welcome development and should be monitored closely and then, if appropriate, extended as resources allow.
- 6.2 There have been clear actions taken to improve communications with the rest of the University community (see also 2.2.5). In general, an improvement has been noted and such efforts should continue and deepen.
- 6.3 IT Services has operated with reducing budgets and in a difficult employment landscape due to the National Employment Control Framework for the Higher Education Sector and other restrictions. The pressures that this imposes on staff can be somewhat alleviated by career development planning and a more formal process to develop skills. While the primary focus of this should be on IT Services staff, there are also opportunities to link with IT professionals throughout the University and facilitate some mobility and exchange on a wider scale.
- 6.4 External suppliers complimented IT Services on their professionalism, commitment and level of skills. IT Services are seen by suppliers as demanding, but not unreasonable, and are in the vanguard in terms of adoption of best practice.
- 6.5 The provision of, and support for, a mix of HPC solutions – own equipment hosted in the Data Centre, UCD’s own Sonic cluster and the access to ICHEC – meet the needs of most computing-intensive researchers but concerns were expressed about the level of Research IT team resources. The IT Strategy and plans should ensure that there continues to be adequate provision of this specialised support. While ICHEC is an important part of the HPC landscape, the continuity of its funding is not certain and the strategy developed should reflect this risk.
- 6.6 The Storage solutions provided by IT Services do not seem competitive to researchers who are deploying their own storage and backup solutions. IT Services should work with UCD Research to seek to achieve a satisfactory solution.

Commendations

- 6.7 The basic infrastructural level of service provided is very good and much appreciated by students and staff. In the past, confidence in the network was not high but it is now a given and viewed as reliable alongside other utilities. Both the open-access and eduroam wifi-networks received praise.
- 6.8 IT Services have responded to strategic initiatives such as UCD Online, Global Engagement and have shown flexibility and commitment to deliver the applications and infrastructure required to enable these.
- 6.9 UCD staff recognised the commitment and professionalism of IT Services staff and paid tribute to it in many individual comments to the Review Group and in the surveys preceding the Review.
- 6.10 Together with Buildings & Services, IT Services have provided standard Teaching Technology equipment and support in bookable rooms. This works well and lecturers now have a uniform platform with which to work.
- 6.11 The density of technology in new buildings is seen as appropriate, and IT Services was praised for not 'over-specifying' buildings with associated cost implications.
- 6.12 Use of Infohub has enabled responsiveness to customer needs in areas such as a suite of HR reports, devolved Post Authorisations, booking of courses etc. Nevertheless, some academic areas perceived that systems are highly customised and did not feel the same level of responsiveness. Recommendations in the areas of governance, planning and prioritisation of projects should help address this (see also chapter 3 above).

Recommendations

- 6.13 In updating the website and other communications, IT Services need to provide real clarity for end-users on the services offered, and also those that are not offered.
- 6.14 The role of IT Relationship Manager should be reviewed when it is fully established and, if appropriate, extended as resources allow.
- 6.15 IT Services should continue to develop and improve communications with the wider UCD community.
- 6.16 In order to facilitate career and skills development within the IT community at UCD, IT Services should expand their existing I-DO (inter-unit development opportunities) to U-DO (university development opportunities) for cross-unit staff mobility and exchange.
- 6.17 IT Services should aim to provide greater clarity in planning and prioritisation, as part of a broader reshaping of IT governance. It would be helpful to develop a mechanism to ensure

that academic users and smaller support units have a clear and formal mechanism for participation in the development of strategy and annual plans. (See also chapter 3).

- 6.18 IT Services should incorporate the recommendations of the Research Foresight report into the IT Strategy, and where such recommendations are not adopted, should provide clear feedback on this.
- 6.19 Where there are linkages between IT Services divisions or with other organisational units, the service should be configured in such a way that the user is not aware of the joins. This applies, for example, to the services provided to staff by Teaching and Learning IT, Media Services and UCD Teaching and Learning. In a similar manner, the delivery of services to students should be integrated as tightly as possible, so that rather than seeing services as belonging to the Library or to IT Services or to Timetabling, a single view is presented. UCD Mobile would be one mechanism whereby this could be achieved.
- 6.20 The Laptop loan service is appreciated and should be expanded, where resources allow. IT Services should work in conjunction with the Library to provide an integrated scheme that offers the best of both current schemes.
- 6.21 Students welcomed the mix of facilities available to them – labs, SUAS (Stand Up and Surf) and laptop loan and expect their needs for all 3 to persist, even though ownership of laptop and other devices is high and is expected to grow even higher. IT Services should work closely with the Library and other relevant units to ensure that any reduction in facilities has minimal impact.
- 6.22 The IT Strategy and plans should ensure that there continues to be adequate provision of appropriate HPC solutions.
- 6.23 IT Services should work with UCD Research to seek to achieve a satisfactory solution to the issue of IT Storage for researchers.
- 6.24 As UCD continues to develop as a global university, the need for support and services outside of standard 9-5 Dublin working days is increasing. This need was articulated in meetings with the Review Group and in the surveys preceding the site visit. IT Services should work with stakeholders to assess the levels of need (see also 2.13), to identify particular priority areas and to develop creative solutions, perhaps involving the deployment of casual staff/students in specific instances.
- 6.25 Improve training of front-line desk regarding Blackboard support to ensure that issues can be escalated appropriately in a timely manner.
- 6.26 Analytics, especially Learning Analytics, was identified by users as an area to be developed by ITS, with a need for greater provision and more formal tools.
- 6.27 There may be scope for more efficient central purchasing of software licenses. For example, the development of 'IT@UCD' would enable a more complete picture of the University's real

licensing position to be determined and therefore the opportunity to replace local purchasing with central purchasing on better terms.

- 6.28 One user identified an issue whereby changes to one system impacted on another system which had not been identified in testing. Documentation improvements, as identified elsewhere, will help address this (see also 4.15).
- 6.29 While the user community praised the Helpdesk and staff in the IT Centres, it was acknowledged that hardware issues were generally outside their scope and that users had at times received poor support from the hardware partners. While not directly a responsibility of IT Services, the unit should consider whether there are any opportunities to improve the user experience for example by recommending enhanced warranties.
- 6.30 The user experience in some off-site locations (particularly hospitals) is not uniformly good and improved training of first-level support will allow issues to be addressed more promptly.

7. Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

A. Highlights and key achievements

Commendations

- A.1 Good leadership, well organised team structure.
- A.2 IT Services is providing an excellent service despite significant staff shortages and budget cuts.
- A.3 Improved communication amongst staff (e.g. Google+, more frequent meetings).
- A.4 Service centres are well organised and provide effective contact points with customers.
- A.5 User support is highly-regarded and responsive.

Recommendations

- A.6 Increase the frequency of meetings between members of the Executive Team and their respective divisions.
- A.7 Inform all staff of decisions in regard to strategic priorities that have been made at team level.
- A.8 Consolidate more divisions (for example, Media Services) across two locations – Computer Centre and Daedalus Building.

- A.9 Organise a series of focus groups to determine customer views on services provided by IT Services.
- A.10 Develop the capacity to analyse and use data more effectively.

B Planning, Organisation and Management

Commendations

- B.1 IT Services' brokering strategy is entirely appropriate. The Review Group encourages UCD and IT Services to continue building on this strategy.
- B.2 An architecture approach is appropriate and consistent with expected market trends in the IT industry as well as other leading institutions in other countries.
- B.3 There is an existing plan to develop an integrated approach to eLearning.
- B.4 Leaders of IT Services and UCD Teaching and Learning have a strong relationship and are committed to providing a seamless experience for academic staff without confusion about organisational structures and responsibilities.

Recommendations

- B.5 UCD should develop an IT governance framework, within the wider University governance, with appropriate structures and processes. This should be linked to year-on-year planning and resource allocation. The structure should enable engagement from units, roles, and levels across the University (though not an exhaustively representative sample in all groups), and provide transparency of plans/commitments to Schools/Departments. Examples are readily accessible through other university websites or direct conversation with CIOs.
- B.6 The Review Group recommends more frequent multi-level meetings within MSU, along with more one-to-one time for staff with the Director.
- B.7 Provide sufficient cross-training to reduce the risk of over-reliance on a single individual with comprehensive knowledge of the InfoHub architecture.
- B.8 In partnership with UCD Teaching and Learning, develop an eLearning "community of practice" including colleges and IT Services. The goal should be to maximise opportunities for collaboration, communication, understanding, reduce duplication, and ensure optimal resources are applied to the educational mission of UCD.
- B.9 Assess UCD's broad needs for a course management system and evaluate products (including new versions of Blackboard that have improved usability) to set an IT architectural direction for the next 3-5 years.

- B.10 In the short-term, IT Services should review Blackboard with a view to making some minor developments that would enhance its effectiveness as a tool for academic staff end-users.
- B.11 Meanwhile, gather feedback from school educational technologists and academic staff directly about shortcomings (this could be one or two half-day workshops) and develop a short-term roadmap to address the critical problems while the larger review is underway.

C. Functions, Activities and Processes

Commendations

- C.1 IT Services delivers a range of high availability core services, with customers appreciating the robustness, capacity and availability of these.
- C.2 The end-user support process is highly regarded, providing in general exceptionally responsive action (often same-day) to address user issues and requests. IT Services staff are regarded as knowledgeable, helpful and willing to go the extra mile to assist staff and student users.
- C.3 Departments using HPC services are broadly happy with the volume and quality of HPC provision and support – a strong achievement given the reduced resources available.
- C.4 External service providers find IT Services as an organisation: fair, reasonable, knowledgeable, demanding of high service quality (without being irrational), and very open to best practice suggestions.

Recommendations

- C.5 IT Services should continue ITIL process adoption across the Unit, with encouragement in the short-term to focus on the Service Catalogue (and the associated cost understanding per service) and on strengthening Incident Management and escalation processes.
- C.6 A review of infrastructure operations should be undertaken, to consider the opportunity of bringing together the network, server, storage, data centre operations consoles into a shared area – thereby enabling a holistic, connected oversight of service delivery, and enabling more responsiveness for incident management.
- C.7 The IT risk register should be expanded to include information security and cyber risks. It may be appropriate to increase the security team resources, and to undertake a cyber-self-assessment (e.g. the UK's FTSE 350 Questionnaire). It may also be appropriate to review the security protections for sensitive information on mobile devices (e.g. email downloading, where this could include personal information), including provision of additional advice for end-users.
- C.8 With very limited HPC staff resources, IT Services will struggle to support any expansion of HPC use in other schools or using other software platforms. Any step change growth in HPC

use by academics may need to be accompanied by associated additional technical staff resources in IT Services – possibly funded through research grants.

- C.9 Recognising the increasingly global nature of university activities and expansion of the ‘working day’ for staff and students beyond the normal Monday to Friday 9-5 operation, IT Services should keep under review its hours of service and increase from 6 am – 12 pm, 364 days per year (for the front-facing helpdesk services). Users generally seemed satisfied with the timing and frequency of scheduled maintenance windows.
- C.10 The wider external market for IT staff means there is a heightened possibility of staff departing. For a number of areas, the levels of documentation appear to be insufficient to ensure that divisions are protected from ‘knowledge-loss’ should staff members leave. This is particularly a risk for application development (MSU). The creation and maintenance of up-to-date documentation should be made part of normal development and service processes, with every project and every technical change resulting from an incident/request being required to complete its documentation before formal closure.
- C.11 As UCD continues its ‘brokering services’ strategy and adopts more and more cloud services, IT Services should explore with its 3rd-party helpdesk provider how it can interact directly (on UCD’s behalf) with other service providers to optimise the response to incidents and requests.
- C.12 The option of providing a ‘managed desktop’ service for staff should be explored again – allowing the provision of ‘zero touch’ (by IT Services) of new devices, and the remote software provision to, and diagnosis and repair of standard machines. Initially this may be targeted at central services users rather than academic users.

D. Management of Resources

Commendations

- D.1 Impressive results in a highly resource-constrained environment.
- D.2 Good progress in adoption of cloud services as opportunities arise.
- D.3 Vision of reallocating IT resources from operations to mission.

Recommendations

- D.4 Increase and expand IT Services’ efforts in talent management in order to develop a better mix of contemporary skills and roles for the IT challenges of today and tomorrow.
 - D.4.1 Create a community involving the full cohort of IT professionals such as “IT@UCD”, deepening links between IT Services and staff associated with other units who are engaged in providing IT service.

- D.4.2 Consider the development of an IT career framework that reflects the specific needs of UCD but which can be modelled on similar frameworks at other universities.
- D.4.3 Invest in leadership skills (so called “soft” skills) for more IT staff.
- D.4.4 Develop and maintain a current listing of all IT and IT-related staff at UCD, no matter where their home unit.
- D.5 Integrate the Media Services division into the mainstream of other staff and groups involved in eLearning developments. Review and update the division’s mandate in light of contemporary approaches to media development and support.
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- D.8 Continue to explore as the preferred option, moving the work currently done in the on campus data centres, to cloud infrastructure-as-a-service offerings.

E. User Perspective

Commendations

- E.1 The basic infrastructural level of service provided is very good and much appreciated by students and staff. In the past, confidence in the network was not high but it is now a given and viewed as reliable alongside other utilities. Both the open-access and eduroam wifi-networks received praise.
- E.2 IT Services have responded to strategic initiatives such as UCD Online, Global Engagement and have shown flexibility and commitment to deliver the applications and infrastructure required to enable these.
- E.3 UCD staff recognised the commitment and professionalism of IT Services staff and paid tribute to it in many individual comments to the Review Group and in the surveys preceding the Review.
- E.4 Together with Buildings & Services, IT Services have provided standard Teaching Technology equipment and support in bookable rooms. This works well and lecturers now have a uniform platform with which to work.
- E.5 The density of technology in new buildings is seen as appropriate, and IT Services was praised for not ‘over-specifying’ buildings with associated cost implications.

- E.6 Use of Infohub has enabled responsiveness to customer needs in areas such as a suite of HR reports, devolved Post Authorisations, booking of courses etc. Nevertheless, some academic areas perceived that systems are highly customised and did not feel the same level of responsiveness. Recommendations in the areas of governance, planning and prioritisation of projects should help address this.

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- E.24 The user experience in some off-site locations (particularly hospitals) is not uniformly good and improved training of first-level support will allow issues to be addressed more promptly.

UCD IT Services Response to the Review Group Report

UCD IT Services welcomes the Quality Review Report and are particularly pleased to note the commendations and examples of good practice identified by the Review Group in this Report and the acknowledgement that IT Services 'manage to provide a very effective service in an austere operating environment'. The good practices recognised by the Review Group are those which IT Services will build upon into the future. Likewise, IT Services welcome the key recommendations in the Report and these will serve as a key input into the development of UCD's IT Strategy 2020 (IT@UCD). IT Services will pay particular attention to the further development of our governance framework, cyber-security provision, and our relationships with other IT staff across the University.

The Report notes that "IT Services has made several key achievements that are indicative of a well-run and forward-looking unit" and "is providing an excellent service despite significant staff shortages and budget cuts" - this is very encouraging and will serve as a much-needed morale booster for IT Services staff.

The site visit was very positive and we thank the Review Group for their professionalism and understanding of a Service area whose complexities are often difficult for others to understand. However, they did so with great precision and consistency and the whole experience was embraced by IT Services staff, who must also be acknowledged and thanked for their enormous effort in both the preparation of the Self-assessment Report and the Review Group Visit itself.

The recommendations in the Report will now be used to inform our IT Strategy 2020 (IT@UCD) and IT Services look forward to building upon its strengths and to continue as a well-run and forward-looking unit as the partner of choice, to enable innovation in support of UCD's Objectives and Strategic Initiatives.



Timetable for Quality Review Visit to IT Services

Monday, 2 – Thursday, 5 February 2015

Preliminary Meeting, Monday, 2 February 2015

- 17.00-19.00 RG meet in the hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the site visit – **RG and UCD Quality Office only**
- 19.30 Dinner hosted for the RG by the Registrar and Deputy President – **RG and UCD Quality Office only**

Day 1: Tuesday, 3 February

Venue: Boardroom, Computer Centre

- 08:55-9.00 Chief Technology Officer and Head, IT Administration greeted Review Group (Computer Centre Reception)
- 09.00-09.30 Private meeting of Review Group
- 09.30-10.30 RG met with Chief Technology Officer
- 10.30-10.45 RG tea/coffee break
- 10.45-11.45 RG met with **ITS Executive Committee**
- 11.50-12.50 RG met with **a number of ITS Heads of Service**
- 12.50-13.30 Lunch – RG only
- 13.30-14.45 A series of meetings took place with ITS staff
- 13.30-14.05 **Customer Services**
- 14:10-14:45 **Various members from small teams**

- 14.45-15.20 RG met with **Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs**
- 15.20-15.45 Refreshment break
- 15.45-17.50 RG meetings with unit staff continued
- 15.45-16.20 **Various members from small teams**
- 16.30-17.05 **Media Services**
- 17.15-17.50 **Technical Services**
- 17.50-18.15 Private Review Group met to identify any remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day
- 18.15 RG depart
- 18.30 Working dinner for RG at hotel

Day 2: Wednesday, 4 February

Initial Venue: Boardroom, Computer Centre

- 08.45-09.15 Private meeting of Review Group
- 09.15-10.30 **Tour of core facilities of the Unit**
- 10.30-10.45 RG tea/coffee break (**Daedalus**)
- 10.45-11.20 RG meetings with unit staff continued - **Management Services** (Daedalus Building)
- 11.20-11.30 RG returned to Computer Centre
- 11.30-12.05 RG meetings with unit staff continued - **Web Services**
- 12.05-13.05 RG met with a representative group of **UCD Staff**
- 13.05-13.50 Lunch – RG only
- 13.50-14.50 RG met with a representative group of **UCD Students**
- 15.00-16.00 RG met with a representative group of **UCD Staff**
- 16.00-16.15 RG tea/coffee break

16.15-17.10	Review Group available for private meetings with unit staff (on request via the UCDQO)
17.15-18.15	RG met with a representative group of External stakeholders
18.15-18.30	Private Review Group met to identify any remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day
18.30	RG departed
19.00	Working dinner for RG at hotel

Day 3: Thursday, 5 February

Venue: Boardroom, Computer Centre

08.45-09.30	Private meeting of Review Group
09.30-09.50	RG met with Chief Technology Officer and Chief Applications Officer
10.00-10.20	RG met with Educational Technologists
10.20-11.00	RG worked on first draft of Review Group Report
11.00-11.15	RG tea/coffee break
11.15-12.45	Preparation of draft Report and exit presentation continued
12.45-13.30	Working lunch for Review Group
13.30-15.00	Preparation of draft Report and exit presentation continued
14.45-15.20	RG tea/coffee break
15.20-15.30	RG travelled to Tierney Building
15.45-16.00	RG met with UCD Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Chief Technology Officer to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
16.00-16.10	RG travelled to Daedalus Building
16.10-16.25	Exit presentation to all available staff of IT Services
16.30	RG departed