

University College Dublin
2011 Thematic Review of Academic Supports for Students - Report Recommendations
Quality Improvement Action Plan – April 2013

Rec. #	Recommendation:	Action Plan	Responsibility for Action & Timescale*
<u>The Business Case for the Provision of Academic Supports for Students</u>			
Para. 4.2	The Review Group members believe that the case for providing high quality, effective student support is overwhelming. However, this does not mean that carte blanche should be given to anyone to do anything. There clearly needs to be accountability and measures of effectiveness. In order to judge the effectiveness of student support, it is necessary to have key statistical information readily available. The Review Group was struck by the noticeable lack of statistical information covering matters such as retention, progression, achievement and employability.	<p>There have been a number of developments in making data available to the University community, most notably is the suite of reports available through the UCD Information Portal “InfoHub”.</p> <p>InfoHub reports designed for the ALL unit provide management data on student registrations, the number of students who withdraw and the number of undergraduate students that have previously registered and completed an access course in UCD.</p> <p>Other InfoHub reports have been developed showing results from the First Destinations Survey and show among other things the % of respondents ‘In Employment’, ‘In Further Study or Training’, ‘Seeking Employment’ or ‘Not Available for Employment’.</p> <p>Student retention and progression statistics by programme have been available for a number of years and are published as part of the University KPIs.</p>	(A)
<u>5.1 Leadership</u>			
Recommendation 1:	That a senior member of staff be given overall responsibility for the development and co-ordination of Student Supports. Such responsibility should not be an “add-on” to an already overloaded portfolio, but should be a significant part of that member of staff’s responsibilities so that it is given the amount of attention it deserves.	A high-level Working Group to examine the future governance and management of Student Supports at University level was established in May 2012. Comprised of key individuals (both academic and professional staff), this group has explored the recommendations in both the Thematic Review of Academic Supports and also those arising from UCD’s Institutional Quality Review. A full set of recommendations	Dep-Registrar T&L (C)

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Recommendation 1: <i>continued</i>		have been drawn up by the Working Group and their Report was passed by the University Undergraduate Programme Board and the University Graduate Programme Board in April 2013. These recommendations will go before the University's Academic Council in May 2013. Amongst the recommendations in this Report is a substantive plan for a clear central governance and management structure for Academic Student Supports.	
<u>5.2 Language/Discourse</u>			
Recommendation 2:	That different terminology be adopted instead of "Student Supports"; the new terminology should be indicative of an integrated array of services accessed by all students to enable them to achieve their full potential.	The issue of terminology was fully explored by the Working Group on Student Supports and a number of different options were considered. After much consideration, it was decided that the overall term "student supports" should remain. However, modules which have been developed recently in response to the specific needs of 1 st years have deliberately used language that reflects this recommendation such as "Learning for Success", now a mandatory module for 1 st year BA students.	Dep-Registrar T&L (A)
<u>5.3 Vision and Strategy</u>			
Recommendation 3:	That the University develop a vision for student support underpinned by a positive philosophy and ethos enabling all students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes required for success in learning and beyond. In addition, that the University produce a strategy to implement its vision which promotes a pedagogical model of student support and considers ways in which the outcomes of student support can be measured.	The challenge of fully engaging a diverse student body within a mass higher-education system is the single most important educational issue facing the modern university. The UCD student experience aims to be a holistic journey of discovery where each student is given every possible encouragement and support to achieve her or his full potential, in both academic and personal spheres. It is one which will provide mentorship, guidance and support to prepare students for their career or profession. A key priority of UCD's Education Strategy is the further development of approaches to engage and support students, especially in their first year. These include small-group learning, peer-mentoring, academic advice and mentoring, specific supports for the development of transferable skills and information literacy and general welfare	Registrar (B/C)

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<p>Recommendation 3: <i>continued</i></p>		<p>supports. We recognise that all students can benefit from academic supports, not just those who may be struggling academically or are deemed as having ‘special needs’. Well-coordinated academic supports have the capacity to raise both individual and overall institutional academic standards.</p> <p>The recent work of the Working Group on Academic Student Supports has sought to further define effective services for students thus:</p> <p><i>Academic student support refers to a range of services provided to undergraduate and graduate students, both full and part-time. Support includes advice and guidance at various points of transition and progression through UCD. It also encompasses the various skills, practical, generic and specific to the programme students are studying. Academic support also encompasses the specialist skills and services some students with particular needs require to participate and succeed in higher education.</i></p> <p>Effective support structures also allow students with specific physical requirements or who come from particular backgrounds to participate fully and succeed in the academic life of the University (such as the Access & Lifelong Learning and UCD International).</p> <p>The recommendations of the Working Group on Academic Student Support are due to be considered by Academic Council in May 2013.</p>	

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<u>5.4 Inclusion</u>			
Recommendation 4:	That the student support strategy should take into consideration alternative ways of providing support for students, including aligning the nature of support with programme requirements and challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peer mentoring has been available for all UCD 1st year undergraduate students since September 2011. To enable this significant increase in the peer-mentoring system a full-time Students Engagement Officer has been employed to work specifically with students on the large BA degree programme. This officer now coordinates the work of approximately 200 peer mentors who offer support for over 1500 1st year BA students. She also runs key supports and social events for BA students throughout their first semester of 1st year. 2. A full review and revision of Orientation took place in 2011 which has included a significant increase in small-group events for incoming 1st year students to help them establish strong links with peers and staff. 3. Detailed recommendations for the structure, governance and management of Academic Students Supports have been prepared and are due for consideration by UCD Academic Council in May 2013. 4. A number of UCD Programmes – Science, Arts, Nursing etc, have now developed specific modules for their 1st year undergraduate students which focus on overall engagement of the students with their discipline of study and the staff who teach them. 5. A report on the management and support of students on Internship placements has been accepted by UCD Academic Council and a new University Internship Manager is now in post, with responsibility for the coordination and harmonisation of the 	UCD T&L (A/B)

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Recommendation 4: <i>continued</i>		management of internships across the University. The work of the Internship Managers (based in UCD Careers) is overseen by a high-level University Internship Board.	
<u>5.5 Student Involvement</u>			
Recommendation 5:	That students be integrally involved as partners in the development of student-centred “Student Supports”, moving beyond consultation towards empowerment.	<p>The ALL Unit has experience of 'students as partners', through the ALL Quality Steering Group, which had two student representatives. This Committee met fortnightly, and despite their academic workload and personal commitments, these students made constructive contributions and offered valuable insights. This positive experience has nonetheless reminded us of the need to be cognisant of the burden that such participation places on students, who are juggling their academic workload and personal and family commitments.</p> <p>In order to continue developing student involvement in developing supports (as outlined in ALL QIP actions), we have set up a working group, led by the Student Adviser HEAR to consider this issue further, building on the University's good practice, e.g. peer-assisted learning (PAL) and also peer-mentoring. In addition, some international developments are taking place which will inform our thinking, including the decision by the European Access Network (EAN) to co-opt the European Student Union (ESU) to the Executive Committee, and the UK's Higher Education Academy 'Students as Partners' programme, developed in collaboration with Birmingham City University.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the deliberations of this Working Group will help inform and guide the University as we facilitate the development of student-centred “Student Supports”.</p>	ALL (B/C)

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<u>5.6 Structures and Communication</u>			
Recommendation 6:	That a review of the structure of the University to include both academic and support services, be undertaken with a view to producing simplification, and alignment of structures to activities.	The Working Group on Academic Students Supports has provided recommendations on such structures. This Report will be considered by Academic Council in May 2013.	Dep-Registrar T&L, ALLL, UCD T&L (B/C)
<u>5.7 Modularisation</u>			
Recommendation 7:	That a review of the impact of modularisation be undertaken to identify ways in which its implementation might be modified to improve the student experience. In particular, opportunities to ensure that students have a sense of identity and can make meaningful relationships with peers and staff should be built in from the very beginning of all programmes.	<p>In 2011 a ‘Focus on First Year’ project brought together all Programme Deans to look at a) the academic structures within which students work in the 1st year b) the academic supports offered to these students and c) the social and pastoral supports offered to students, particularly in the 1st year of their time at university. The Deputy Registrar Teaching and Learning and UCD Teaching and Learning have played a key role in coordinating many of these responses in order to ensure a coherent and even development and delivery of these enhanced and reorganised services. Direct outcomes of these projects already achieved have been:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The introduction of peer mentoring for all UCD 1st year undergraduate students from September 2011. To enable this significant increase in the peer-mentoring system a full-time Students Engagement Officer has been employed to work specifically with students on the large BA degree programme, which is the largest degree programme in the State, at over 5,000 students. This Officer now coordinates the work of approximately 200 peer mentors who offer support for over 1500 1st year BA students. She also runs key supports and social events for BA students throughout their first semester of 1st year. 2. A full review and revision of Orientation (see point below) which has included a significant increase in small-group events for incoming 	Dep-Registrar T&L, UCD T&L, Prog Deans, VPT&L (A/B)

* **Timescale**

A = already implemented

B = within one year

C = within 2-5 years

X = requires additional funding

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<p>Recommendation 7: <i>continued</i></p>		<p>1st year students to help them establish strong links with peers and staff.</p> <p>3. The establishment of a drop-in academic Writing Support Centre for students to support them in coping with their studies. Funded by UCD Teaching & Learning through SIF 2, the Writing Support Centre has been in operation for over a year, working primarily with students in the BA degree. Unfortunately, the discontinuation of SIF or similar teaching-focused State funding puts the further development of this and UCD's well-developed and highly-regarded Maths Support Centre at risk.</p> <p>4. A review and re-design of 1st year assessment, now in its second year, exploring assessment strategy and assessment approaches at Programme level. These will be analysed in relation to UCD's 1st year Assessment Design principles, informed by current research and best international practice. This will lead to a revision of 1st year assessment strategies and approaches, in the context of desired programme and stage outcomes. These changes will be implemented at module level by April 2012, for implementation in academic session 2012/2013 and the review process will be extended to all other programmes in the University in 2012/13.</p> <p>5. An increased use of peer assisted learning schemes where students at more advanced stages of their programme lead study and revision sessions with 1st year students, which compliment lectures and tutorials. These student learning leaders offer effective advice and support to students in a number of academic programmes and areas including Access & Lifelong Learning who support students from non-traditional backgrounds, those beginning their study as adults and also those wishing to study flexibly.</p>	

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<u>5.8 Staff Development</u>			
Recommendation 8:	That appropriate professional development opportunities are provided for staff and students involved in providing student support.	<p>One of the key recommendations of the Working Group on Student Supports is have a senior academic undertake a strategic analysis of the relevant areas to be included under the remit of the yet to be established University Student Supports Board.</p> <p>This strategic analysis is to include a review of the current job specifications/workload priorities of relevant staff groups involved in academic student supports (yet to be absolutely determined) including but not limited to Student Advisors, Student Engagement Officers, Programme Office, UCD Registry/International affiliated staff etc. This analysis would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checking out understanding of the student support roles by incumbents, students and relevant manager groups • gathering relevant baseline information, including an audit of internal and external professional development opportunities availed of by particular cohorts of staff engaged in the provision of student supports e.g. Student Advisors • gathering the views of management staff who hold responsibility for staff engaged in student support • preparing a proposal for discussion by the Student Support Services Board 	ALL (B/C)

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<u>5.9 Academic Skills</u>			
Recommendation 9:	That critical academic skills (essay writing, referencing, information skills etc.) should be fully integrated into the Semester 1 curriculum, and built on through subsequent stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st year engagement modules (e.g. 'Learning for Success' (BA Degree/'Science Concepts' BSc modules), specific to the requirements of individual programmes, have been established in a number of large undergraduate degrees. These modules utilise online self-paced resources covering a range of critical academic skills as well as face-to-face small group teaching • The establishment of the existing Writing Centre on a permanent basis and extend to the entire undergraduate and graduate communities is under discussion at Senior Management level. 	Deans; VPTLs (A) Registrar; Dep. Registrar T&L College Principal Arts & Celtic Studies and College Principal Human Sciences (B)
<u>5.10 BA Programme</u>			
Recommendation 10:	That steps would be taken to improve the experience for students on the BA programme, particularly through providing structured opportunities during Orientation and throughout the first semester, for students to make relationships with their peers and with academic staff. In addition, an urgent high-level review needs to be undertaken to streamline provision and to improve the clarity of structures and pathways within the BA programme.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A comprehensive and integrated orientation and support programme for BA students has now been established including: (i) the appointment of a dedicated BA Engagement Officer in September 2011; (ii) pre-orientation academic advisory sessions; (iii) peer mentoring for all 1st year BA students; (iv) BA Linked-Up initiative to extend support throughout the 1st year; (v) Learning for Success module for all Stage 1 BA students. 2. Funded through a President's Teaching Award, a digitized modular curricular map of English, is being developed to assist students navigate the large number of modules and pathways on offer from 1st to Final Year. It is expected that this type of interactive curricula map will have wider application across the University. 	College Principles; Dean & VPTLs in CACS & CHS. (A) Dr N McAreavey & UC'D T&L (C)