



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

REGISTRY AND ASSOCIATED UNITS

ACADEMIC YEAR 2015

Confidential

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1. Introduction

The review took place 14th-16th April 2015 and covered a range of administrative units reporting to the Vice President Academic and Registrar as follows

- The Registry (including Student Records and Registration, Examinations and Timetabling, Conferring, External Examiner and Academic Database)
- The Admissions Office
- The Access Office
- The Graduate Studies Office
- The International Office
- The Centre for Teaching and Learning (and Academic Advisory Office).
- The Placement Office
- The Career Development Centre

These areas cover the full range of central functions and management related to academic administration of the student life cycle from outreach to admission and registration to academic support and examinations to graduation and career advice.

The review did not include a number of the related areas whose functions and activities overlap with or impinge on the functions and activities of the units under review. These include:

- Fees and Grants Office (fee collection and administration)
- Student Services (health, welfare, social and sporting services for students)
- IT services (responsible for maintenance of the IT systems, including Registry systems)
- Faculty offices

However, the Peer Review Group (PRG) was able to meet with representatives from most of these other areas in the course of the review visit in their capacity as internal stakeholders.

2. Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Hanne Smidt	EUA	Senior Advisor
Professor Paul Giller	UCC	Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic
William Kelly	DCU	Deputy Registrar
Professor Michael Doherty	MU	Head of Department of Law
Terry Roche	MU	Administrator, Department of Biology
Andrew Garrad	MSU (Maynooth Students' Union)	Outgoing Education Officer and SU Deputy President

3. Timetable of the site visit

The PRG visit took place 13 – 16 May 2015 (see Appendix 1 for Timetable) and was extremely well organised and whilst a very full timetable had been established, there was sufficient flexibility to allow for changes as requested by the PRG. A range of meetings allowed for the PRG to meet all the units under review as well as a number of stakeholder groups (although because of the size and breadth of the review some parallel meetings were held). Through changes to the timetable, the PRG were able to create sufficient space for deliberation and formulation of the exit presentation.

4. Peer Review Methodology

4.1 Site Visit

The site visit was extended by an additional day in light of the size of the review. This allowed the PRG to meet all relevant units under review, a number of other administrative units whose functions and activities overlapped with or impinged on those under review, and a number of stakeholder groups including the Vice President for Strategy and Quality, undergraduate, postgraduate and international students, Deans, Heads of Department and a small number of external stakeholders (Guidance Counsellors and an industrial placement host). The extent of the review in terms of the number of inter-related functions and activities did constrain the time available for each of individual the meetings however. The number of meetings timetabled and the range of groups to be met was such that the PRG also had to run a number of parallel meetings (particular with stakeholders) however, this did not materially affect the PRG's ability to conduct the review.

Whilst the time available to meet the various units and stakeholders was necessarily constrained by the extent of the review, the PRG was able to explore and clarify issues that arose from consideration of the SAR and gather sufficient additional information to allow a robust review report to be produced.

The PRG was somewhat disappointed with the limited number and nature of external stakeholders that were made available for interview but understands the challenges in arranging such meetings. This did mean that the overall review was almost exclusively focused on the internal quality assurance within the university.

The PRG is very grateful to all staff in the Office of the Registrar and of the VP for Strategy and Quality for their help and support and for the exceptional organisation of the site visit.

We are also very grateful for the level of interaction in the process from staff, in their openness and engagement all of which provided the PRG with evidence and clear insight into the *Maynooth ethos* and its sense of place in Irish higher education.

4.2 Peer Review Group Report

The Peer Review Group Report is based on the SAR that each of the reviewed units/functions have provided to the group, the interviews with staff from all the units and internal and external stakeholders. The PRG created time within the Site Visit to consider the general outcomes of parallel meetings and the main issues that had arisen from review of the SAR and consultations with the various units and stakeholders. A number of general and high level recommendations were agreed and delivered at the exit presentation and more detailed comments and recommendations brought together in the development of the full PRG Report herein.

The PRG has not taken the usual approach in a quality review of benchmarking against *past* practice but has instead chosen to benchmark against the *future*, cogniscent of the very significant changes the university is undergoing in light of the new leadership and clear strategic direction of the university, the introduction of an extensive change to the curriculum structure and delivery and the need for extensive modification and upgrading of IT systems.

The review was also guided by looking at the quality of the life cycle of a student in the context of the strategic changes identified to us (from pre-entry to post-graduation).

The initial drafting of the PRG Report was carried out by the external members and further development of the report by all members led to the pre-final and agreed document.

The area under review was provided with the opportunity to correct any factual errors following which the PRG finalised its report for the University.

5. Overall Assessment

5.1 Summary Assessment of the Present State of the Unit

The PRG took the view that its role was to quality assure the overall area rather than very specifically the individual units under review in the light of future development and to:

- a) Explore whether there are appropriate systems/processes in place to support and deliver on the necessary functions for the university and the stakeholders
- b) Examine how are the individual units and the overall area are assuring the quality of what they do
- c) Consider the extent to which the activities, responsibilities and functioning of other areas and units outside of the area under review were affecting the quality and nature of delivery of functions of the units under review
- d) Formulate a set of recommendations to the university, to the overall area and to the individual units under review related to processes, systems and structures which the PRG believe can quality assure and potentially improve the functioning of delivery by the units and the university

The outcomes of the review and the nature of the PRG recommendations are strongly influenced by our understanding of the context in which the university and the overall Registrar's area are functioning. This includes

- very substantial growth in the undergraduate population over the last five years
- declining sectoral funding from the exchequer and consequent resource constraints
- changes in Senior Management and strategic direction of the university
- ambitious growth target for next five years to 2020
- the new Curriculum Initiative
- the Campus Development Plan (which is underpinned by the ambitious growth target)
- IT system constraints
- the importance, as described to the PRG, of maintaining the Maynooth ethos while reaching new strategic goals.

The PRG have concluded that:

1. Quality of staff within the area is the major asset

- The staff of the area are very committed, very professional but very stretched
- The quality of the staff are clearly recognised by internal and external stakeholders who used terms like "fantastic", "highly professional", and "incredible" in their descriptions of various staff and offices
- Staff have a great capacity to make things work in spite of process, systems and structural constraints and challenges

2. It is also evident to the PRG that in those cases where the units have clearly measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), those units that had:

- autonomy (i.e. had decision-making responsibility and/or were not relying on other areas to deliver to the KPIs)
- a clear and focused mandate
- relatively higher staffing and other resources
- no excessive reliance on IT systems for delivery of their functions

have been better able to meet their targets set in the strategic plan.

3. The PRG have identified future risks to the quality of provision and supports in some units/functions in terms of

- single points of failure (related to individual staff carrying significant responsibilities that underpin a range of other critical functions)
- (over) reliance on manual interventions
- lack of necessary autonomy and authority within the area and for particular offices to make timely and effective decisions to deliver on their KPIs
- lack of integration of key systems (leading to duplication of effort)
- unfilled vacancies at leadership level

4. The above findings pose questions as to:
- how sustainable are current processes, systems, and structures in the light of the strategic path of the university?
 - are there changes to process, systems, or structures that can assure the quality of delivery and functioning of the units under review and thereby support the delivery of the strategic plan of Maynooth University?

5.2 Self-Assessment Report

Overall, the Self Assessment Report (SAR) was a well produced, sufficiently detailed and readable document. However, whilst many of the individual unit had completed their sections using a similar and complete template not all had done so. Neither had some of the units presented a SWOT analysis which led to their sections being more along the lines of a commentary on what the unit does and has achieved rather than a self-reflective document that can lead to internal development of quality improvement agendas and plans. Those areas that did provide reflective reports raised valuable and appropriate issues in need of further development as well as identifying problems with their internal processes and systems.

In addition, the PRG was struck by the fact that many of the individual units had not apparently undertaken stakeholder surveys hence were reliant solely on internal views of the performance, quality of service and issues. This may be partly explained by the small size of several units and time constraints making it challenging to carry out surveys or have focus group meetings with stakeholders. These deficits were remedied to a great extent during the site visit where all areas were very open in the identification of issues and concerns and opportunities for improvement and the internal stakeholders provided much of the missing information.

Thirdly, the PRG was struck by the relatively limited mention of and reflection on 3U (the alliance between MU, DCU and RCSI) and how this development impinged on or created opportunities for the development of their internal processes and systems.

The SAR was helpful in raising a number of issues for the attention of the PRG and in directly seeking advice on structures (including integration of units and flexibility in job roles), on efficiencies that might be possible and on further development of services.

6. Findings of the Peer Review Group: Commendations and Recommendations

6.1 Overview

The findings of the PRG and the emergent set of recommendations can be divided into three levels (to the university, to the overall Registrar's area and to the individual units under review) and are related to processes, systems and structures.

The PRG was very impressed by the quality of staff, their professionalism, work ethic and the high standing in which they are held by stakeholders. Whilst from the outside, the systems and processes seem to work successfully and in some areas of activity are recognised as sector-leading, overall there is a vulnerability and threat to the sustainability of the delivery of academic administration in the face of the university's ambitious strategic goals due to IT system constraints, relatively low staffing levels, and some process and structural issues within the area and at university level. The success of some offices (such as Admissions and Access) provide examples of what may be possible when the Office is provided with the necessary resources, have clear and focused objectives supported at university level, are provided with the appropriate autonomy and decision-making and are not reliant on outdated or non-integrated systems.

A. Overall resourcing and structure of the Registrar's area.

- i. The PRG commends the quality, professionalism, commitment, work ethic and dedication of the staff. They have the great capacity to make things work in spite of evident challenges and constraints related to process, systems and structures. The PRG does not believe that this is sustainable in light of increasing challenges and needs of the growth strategy and new curriculum initiative. This is particularly relevant in light of the stated strategic goals of reducing the resource spend per individual student on administration and service provision under the aggressive growth strategy.
[Recommendation – University should plan additional resource proportionate to growth of the university]
- ii. The PRG recognises that there appears to be an imbalance in resourcing within the area as a whole where the focus appears to have been on CAO and access student marketing and admission (both relatively within MU and benchmarked against other Irish institutions) and less on the ongoing administration and service/support which will be so important in development and delivery of the new curriculum initiative. These units have been extremely successful however in delivering on their KPIs and targets set by the university. This situation appears also to have created a mismatch in terms of strategic goals of the university (viz internationalisation and graduate education) and resource distribution.
[Recommendation – University should review resource distribution across the area]

- iii. The current overall structure of the area suggests an over-distribution of responsibilities and functions with many individual offices of relatively small size and overlapping responsibilities and functions.
[Recommendation – Consistent with its recent appointment of a Director of Registry, the University should review current office structure with a view to integration across the area, reducing duplication of activities, improving information and process flow, integrating databases and creating greater critical mass in staffing.]
- iv. The effectiveness of some functions is currently being constrained through the fragmentation of service across units. As an example, a range of services in the administration and support of graduate students are distributed between Admissions, Registration, Records, International and Graduate Studies offices.
[Recommendation – undertake process review to explore the possibilities of integrating processes to provide more effective function and effective one-stop-shop for graduate students and similarly for other stakeholder groups]
- v. The geographical spread of offices between north and south campus may be exacerbating the fragmentation and duplication of functions.
[Recommendation- consider opportunities for relocation of offices to promote greater proximity of mutually supporting student-facing functions]
- vi. The limited staffing resources in most administrative areas, associated with the relatively large number of small units, has led to a situation where there are a number of key single points of failure, where an individual staff member is the sole point of knowledge and function, in spite of the criticality of the function (e.g. timetabling, academic database management).
[Recommendation – urgent need to consider both integration of offices and introduction of flexibility in job roles to overcome the evident single points of failure in key administrative areas and functions]
- vii. An issue raised in the SAR (P.45) and during the site visit related to the dual responsibility of the Dean for both Graduate Studies and International Affairs, given the strategic import of both areas. The pressures placed on the Dean are exacerbated by the lack of a Director of Graduate Studies leading to the Dean likely being tied up with detailed operational issues. The PRG would sympathise with the problems this situation creates.
[Recommendation – The Registrar consider creating separate leadership roles for International and Graduate Studies and where resources allow consider appointing a Head of Graduate Studies office]

B. University-level structure and system issues

- i. The evidence from the SAR, consultation with senior management and offices in the area and other stakeholders suggests that the level of responsibility and decision-making capacity of academic Departments may make it difficult for the university to drive strategy and for the offices in the area under review to deliver on their targets/KPIs and responsibilities and implement university policy, e.g., recruitment

of international and graduate students. A number of Offices reported on a lack of sufficient engagement and/or support from Academic Units.

[Recommendation – The university should explore the benefits of providing greater levels of administrative autonomy to key academic administrative offices and in strengthening the functions and responsibilities of faculty Offices and Deans (along the lines of a greater executive and resource management function)]

- ii. In light of the apparent vulnerability of the area to continue to deliver the necessary high quality service and functions to the university under the ambitious growth strategy and new developments, the stated strategic goals of reducing the resource spend per individual student on administration and service provision may pose a serious risk to the university.

[Recommendation – plan additional resource proportionate to growth of the university]

- iii. The SAR and consultations during the PRG site visit raised very clear issues with the current IT infrastructure in relation to both ongoing delivery of services and processes and emerging needs under the curriculum initiative and growth strategy in terms of online registration, timetabling, process approval tracking, electronic document production and the evolving academic database under the curriculum initiative.

[Recommendation –an urgent need for review and upgrading of the IT infrastructure that supports academic administration in MU]

- iv. The SAR (P.37) raised an insightful point that, despite the strategic ambitions of the university, the continued success in growing undergraduate numbers could lead to a perception of MU as predominantly a teaching university.

C. Systems and processes within the Registrar's area

- i. The SAR identified a clear need for improvement in formal documentation on procedures and operations and the PRG would support this. Options might include an Academic Policy and Regulations handbook to be placed onto the online policy website and a timetable to develop Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) and full documentation within units. This would be seen to benefit both internal offices as well as key academic and other administrative stakeholders and help support the implementation of university policy.

[Recommendation – development of an Academic Policy and Regulations handbook to be placed on the online policy website; a timetable to develop SOPs and full documentation within units would be beneficial]

- ii. The fragmentation of Registry offices (in both geographical position and functions) and over-distribution and overlap of some functions within the overall area creates challenges to enhancing processes and effectiveness. The PRG believes that there would be value in developing a coherent strategy build around the overall student life cycle from pre-entry, registration and orientation, progression through the degree to graduation and exit from the university with supports and interventions identified at different stages and in a more integrated way than at present.

[Recommendation - develop a coherent strategy build around the overall student

life cycle from pre-entry, registration and orientation, progression through the degree to graduation and exit from the university with supports and interventions identified at different stages and in an integrated way]

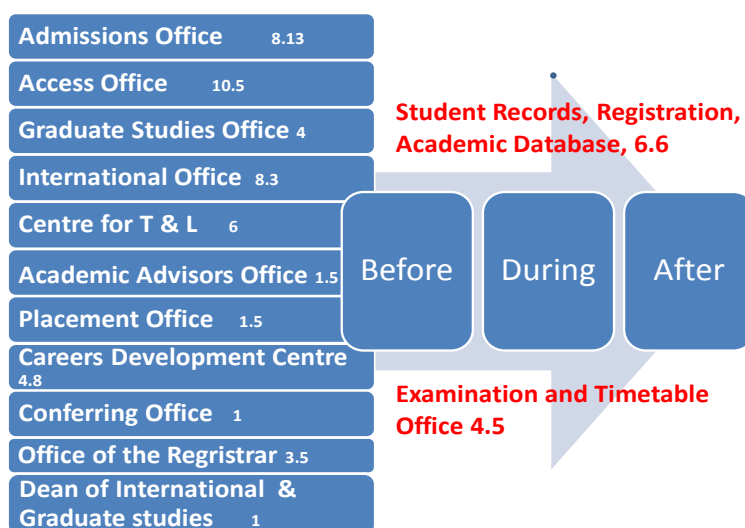
- iii. It is evident from the SAR and from consultations during the site visit that student data sets and data bases are fractured and that there are multiple sources of the same data type which can, in turn, differ in content (e.g. Moodle data, records and examinations data, local departmental data) thus causing administrative difficulties. [Recommendation – The PRG believes that it is essential that agreement is reached on establishing single institutional data sets that are made available to all relevant stakeholders and offices].

- iv. As reported in the SAR and as evident from consultations during the site visit, particularly with the examinations office and academic departments, there is a significant level of manual intervention necessary within the examination process and operations that pose a considerable risk to the quality and assurance of the process as well as adding significant workload within both administrative and academic units. We understand that this relates to the double level of compensation (at both module and at subject level), to the fact that compensation levels are different within and between subjects (25% and 35% respectively) and that there are three levels that operate within the examination regulations (module, subject and programme). The ITS system apparently is unable to cope with this complexity such that examination results must be downloaded, manually, additional calculations carried out outside of the ITS system at Department level, then manually uploaded again to ITS, with the whole process checked again manually by the Examinations Office. The fact that the MU examination systems relies on a single University Examination Board at which overall examination profiles for the entire student population are seen for the first time poses further risk to the assurance of quality and standards of the examination process. The PRG is thus extremely concerned at the potential risks posed by the current examination processes that require significant manual interventions throughout and with limited overall oversight at university level.
[Recommendation – - The PRG recommends that either the ITS system is modified to allow for the 3-level and double compensation elements to the regulations, which may or may not be possible, or that the regulations are changed to simplify the marks and standards to one level of compensation under a fully modularised structure (which will likely be necessary under the new curriculum initiative in any case). In addition, we recommend that the Examination Board process be reviewed to better assure standards and rigour in the examination process. The PRG was advised by the Computer Centre that it will not be possible in the short term (and within the time frame for introduction of the Curriculum initiative and increase in growth of the university) to implement a new IT system.]

D. Unit level issues

The PRG have listed the units in relation to the student life cycle in order to highlight the importance of organising the units and responsibilities based on the users of the services. The Figure below also indicates a relative imbalance between recruitment and support for enrolled students and graduates.

Figure 1 Offices supporting students' progression path (with staff FTE)



Admissions Office

The Admissions Office is a very focused unit delivering very successfully on targets set under the strategic growth strategy for undergraduate numbers of the university. The success of the Office, recognised internally and externally, is based on strong relationships with both external and internal stakeholders who are very complimentary about the professional and effective manner in which the Office carries out its functions.

The Office is one of the few within the Registrar's area that appear to have the necessary level of autonomy and authority in decision-making necessary to deliver on their targets and strategic plan objectives. This level of autonomy and decision-making ability afforded to the Admissions Office might be considered as a good model for other offices involved in the recruitment and admission of students.

The Office undertakes a number of additional functions to the recruitment function (such as academic advising) which could be considered for integration within a potential one-stop-shop for student services administration and advice. The office was commended by stakeholders for the quality and the effectiveness of their outreach and support. [Recommendation: Despite the success of the Admissions Office and the evident high quality of delivery of their functions, the Office has identified a range of enhancements following their self assessment activities which the PRG would endorse]

Registry

The staff in the Registry (Student Records, Registration, Academic Database, Examinations and Timetabling Office) are recognised as extremely dedicated, highly professional and knowledgeable and are delivering the required functions and processes in spite of significant constraint described elsewhere in the report. A sense of unappreciated staff and functions was reported to the PRG evidenced by the apparent lack of consultation within strategic

decision making and developments, concerns over the likelihood of replacement of vacancies, and the continuous pressure for greater efficiencies in the face of ever greater demands. Given the criticality of the area to the success of the university in delivering on its growth strategy and new curriculum initiative, this issue is one that deserves attention by the university.

The SAR clearly highlighted a range of issues impinging on the quality of delivery by the area and on their ability to meet the demands of the numerous stakeholders, and the outcome of the site visit bore out these issues. The challenges can be defined under three headings:

- i. IT systems. The current system, ITS, as used under the current academic processes, marks and standards etc., is not fully automated and hence requires considerable manual interventions and processes. The Timetabling system is reported to be outdated and not linked to either the ITS or academic database system. The Academic Database is a bespoke and unsupported system and the reporting tools are also now unsupported.
- ii. It is evident from the SAR and site visit that there are capacity issues in relation to staffing and the management systems
- iii. Over-arching system and process integration would be beneficial to the quality of delivery and to reducing risk in key processes

The Records and Registration Office undertakes a range of activities that would appear to relate to the functions of other Offices such as PAC, Adult Education, ERASMUS, International students. The level of necessary manual intervention is relatively high and poses considerable risk to quality assurance as well as increasing workloads amongst already overstretched staff. The area should consider undertaking a review of workflows associated with different groups of students, where the responsibility for them should lie, and how workflows and processes could be realigned and redistributed to enhance the ease and effectiveness of delivery.

Similar issues were raised during the site visit in relation to Examinations and Timetabling, where the staff recognise evident duplication of effort, and excessive manual interventions resulting from the outdated IT system and peculiarities of the marks and standards that raise issues around the assurance of quality in the examination process. In relation to both timetabling and the academic database, both functions are delivered by single staff members, and whilst their professionalism and support of the academic units was highlighted by stakeholders, these functions do represent critical single points of failure within the entire academic programme administration.

[Recommendation – The PRG have identified a range of specific recommendations elsewhere in the report that directly relate to the Registry, including systems and process review, staff resourcing, consideration of integration of office structures leading to greater critical mass and reduced risk of single critical points of failure.

Recommendation – The PRG would also recommend the university consider creating staff development opportunities to allow cross-functional training and development and opportunities to evolve more integrated processes, workflows and hence help mediate the over-reliance on single individuals for critical functions]

Access Office

The Access Office is successfully delivering a range of services spanning outreach, transition to university, and post-entry supports and the office was commended by stakeholders for the quality and the effectiveness of their outreach and support. It has a clear mission and focus and is a model of good practice in the field. Its reputation has contributed to its success relative to the performance of others in the sector in recruiting target groups; it has identified relevant KPIs and uses these to assist it in effectively targeting resources.

It has a wide pattern of collaboration with other internal units – Departments, Admissions, Examinations and Timetabling, Centre for Teaching and Learning, for example - and there is evidence of benefits to its students and the wider student body of these collaborations. The mainstreaming of its *Student Plus* learning support module to all students is an excellent example of this.

Further success in achieving ambitious targets over the coming years will create greater pressure on resource supports for mature students and those students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds; issues of accessibility to older campus buildings are identified as a key bottleneck for students with physical disabilities.

[Recommendation: the University should ensure that recruitment targets are matched by adequate resourcing of its functions and those of supporting units; the way the office interacts for the benefit of the students with other units can be a model to follow and ensure that all students can get a “one-stop-shop” experience when in need of assistance and support.]

Graduate Studies

The Office was commended by stakeholders for the quality and effectiveness of the pastoral care and advice for students, orientation, and support for scholarship holders and applicants, although there was some degree of lack of clarity for users as to exactly what the Office does and does not provide. The PRG were made aware of the constraints under which the Office works in relation to its ability to make decisions on student offers, admissions etc. associated with the level of autonomy at academic departmental level.

The PRG noted an inconsistency between the university strategy with its emphasis on interdisciplinary programmes and a generally held departmental view of a demand for narrower, disciplinary specific programmes at postgraduate level.

Similar issues in relation to the level of Departmental autonomy in the rules and regulations around PhD student acceptance, progression, supervision etc. were noted and this raised concerns in the PRG around the likely variation in the quality of experience of PhD students and the maintenance of standards. It was also evident that the devolution to departments in many cases leads to extended time frames from application to offer and acceptance and duplication of checks on applications in Graduate Studies and academic departments.

[Recommendation – The university should explore the benefits of providing greater levels of administrative autonomy to key academic administrative offices and in strengthening the functions and responsibilities of faculty Offices and Deans (along the lines of a greater executive and resource management function)]

The university would appear to be disadvantaged in terms of meeting its strategic goals by the current lack of integration of processes and extensive distributed and devolved decision making and administration outside of the Graduate Studies Office.

[Recommendation – The PRG would support the suggestion made by the Office in their SAR, and recommends a review of current processes around administration and support of graduate students with a view towards greater integration and emergence of a one-stop-shop Graduate Studies Office and possibly consideration of the introduction of a Graduate School at Faculty or Institutional level]

[Recommendation: As mentioned earlier, the Registrar should consider creating separate leadership roles for International and Graduate Studies and where resources allow consider appointing a Head of Graduate Studies office]

There would also be concern regarding the reported extent of manual interventions with most data sets run on individual excel spreadsheets.

[Recommendation – process and structural review to eliminate the need for manual interventions]

During consultation with stakeholders the structured PhD came under some significant criticism with some evidence of lack of compliance with university policy and the need for manual interventions and oversight, lack of buy in amongst some departments and an apparent lack of quality assurance of generic modules. The PRG would recommend a review of the structured PhD implementation and quality.

[Recommendation – review of the delivery and management of structured PhD and management of PhD progression in the context of sectoral developments in this area]

The PRG would support the Graduate Studies Office desire for a university-level review of the portfolio of postgraduate taught programmes and of the need for the targeting of a more market-driven approach to development of the portfolio in order to meet the university's strategic goals in this area.

[Recommendation – The PRG supports the proposal highlighted in the SAR and recommends that a university-or faculty level review of the portfolio of taught postgraduate programmes be undertaken, underpinned by the development of institutional policies governing the development and running of such programmes more in line with needs of the university]

International Office

The Office was commended by stakeholders for support of international students, the strong student focus and for the flexibility in taking on roles and functions that would not normally be part of the function of such an office so that international students are not disadvantaged.

The PRG is aware of a range of issues relevant to the university and the overall Registrar's area level that impinge on the office's ability to meet its strategic goals that need attention in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Office's activities and functioning. These include:

- Staffing capacity issues
- Limited availability of on-campus and local accommodation for students

- Lack of access for international students for modules they have come to take and lack of access to Moodle and associated facilities and services due to time required to register
- The level of manual interventions needed
- Lack of engagement by some academic departments in the internationalisation agenda
- Inability of the international Office to make offers to non-EU postgraduate students
- The timeliness of fee-setting in respect of international students (although this issue may already have been resolved)
- Role of International Office in handling international fees and grants.

The PRG is supportive of the range of activities and developments proposed in the Office's SAR to enhance student recruitment, improve the information systems and the desire to work towards greater integration of administrative activities and functions across the university.

The PRG recognises the need for a more integrated approach with departments in recruitment and processing of applications.

[Recommendation: The PRG recommends that a review of the processes and structures relating to international students be undertaken to remove the constraints hampering the functioning and delivery of the Office in order to enhance the quality of the student experience and support the delivery of the ambitious strategic growth in international student numbers]

Centre for Teaching and Learning

Since 2011, the Centre for Teaching and Learning has a dual role in having responsibilities for the professional development of academic staff and services to students. The PRG was impressed by its emphasis on research-led approaches to its work. The Centre for Teaching & Learning collaborates very effectively with other units in student development and academic support. Its approach to professional development for staff is also to be commended; in particular, their annual showcase shows innovation in context and its growth in participation is strong evidence of a widespread buy-in by staff of the approach taken by the Centre.

The professional development for staff includes accredited learning, fellowships, other non-accredited learning opportunities and its support and training in aspects of technology-enhanced learning. Its annual Teaching and Learning Showcase is an excellent example of sharing of good practice and experience across university departments.

The services to students range from the work of the Writing Centre (which also supports staff) through its *Student Plus* programmes that support the transition to university to support for technology enhanced learning. The Academic Advisory Office has a specific role in advising and assisting students who may encounter difficulties in their programmes of study.

It is likely that the Curriculum Initiative will generate a further set of demands of the Centre through its intended contributions to the development of critical skills modules and – in the context of wider sets of choices for students – a greater need for academic advisors. [Recommendation: the University needs to ensure that adequate resource levels are maintained for the Centre as the further growth and implementation of the Curriculum Initiative takes place]

Advice for students encountering difficulties

During its consultations with stakeholders, it was clear to the PRG that the delivery of academic advice for students encountering difficulties was highly fragmented. Various, we were advised that the appropriate point of contact was the Academic Advisory Office, the Admissions Office, Departmental offices, and the Students' Union. It was clear that the advice or remedy for a student encountering difficulties might vary hugely depending on which of the university offices might be approached.

[Recommendation: the university mandate a single point as the first stage in advising such students.]

Placement Office

The Placement Office has scaled its operations very considerably in recent years without a concomitant increase in resources and its continued success and reputation is testament to remarkable levels of commitment of its staff. It demonstrably has a commitment to the students it places far above the minimum required and there is evidence of most effective relationships with external stakeholders. However, it is clear to the PRG that the increased demands that will be placed on the Office with the roll-out of the Curriculum initiative cannot be sustained with its current staffing and resources. A greater degree of involvement by Departments in the work of the Placement Office will be required if it is to deliver on its intended role. It is clear to the PRG that there should be synergies with the Career Development Centre, both having defined but complementary roles in a student life cycle. [Recommendation – It would be to the benefit of the university's strategic development and its work to support student's transition to employability that the Placement Office, the Career Development Centre and the Alumni Office establish a forum to enhance the university's knowledge base for the benefit of the students.]

Career Development Centre

The vision outlined in the SAR and the key elements of an employability strategy that bear directly on these points are to be commended.

It is clear that Careers are stretched to deliver on the service model that they have adopted: waiting times for one-to-one appointments for students of three to four weeks are not unusual. The option of walk-in advice – offered for up to 4½ hours per day – may deal with immediate issues but this is not a sustainable solution. As the student body grows and in the absence of a very significant increase in resources, an alternative service delivery model is indicated. The recommendation of the 2010 review that the Career Development Centre

develop a module or workshop for delivery to defined groups of students that could reduce the requirement for one-to-one meetings thus stills holds.

It would appear that the centre at present has little interaction with employers in the region, which will not, in the long term, enhance or facilitate graduate transition to the labour market and new developments and changing requirements may be missed. Feedback from employer stakeholders indicated a strong willingness to actively work with the University if approached. In the context of the Curriculum Initiative and an increased emphasis on student placements, there should be obvious synergies with the Placement Office. The PRG also noted that the alumni work is separated from the centre's work.

[Recommendation – It would be to the benefit of the university's strategic development and its work to support the student's transition to employability that the Placement Office, the Career Development Centre and the Alumni Office establish a forum to enhance the university's knowledge base for the benefit of the students.]

6.2 Commendations

The PRG has identified a range of good practices and success in the main body of the report but would highlight the following commendations:

The PRG commends the quality, professionalism, commitment, work ethic and dedication of the staff. They have the great capacity to make things work in spite of evident challenges and constraints related to process, systems and structures.

Stakeholders commended the Admissions office for their engagement, and the quality and effectiveness of their outreach and support.

The staff in the Registry (Student Records, Registration, Academic Database, External examiners, Examinations and Timetabling Office) are recognised as extremely dedicated, highly professional and knowledgeable and are delivering the required functions and processes in spite of significant constraint described elsewhere in the report.

The Access Office is successfully delivering a range of services spanning outreach, transition to university, and post-entry supports and the office was commended by stakeholders for the quality and the effectiveness of their outreach and support.

The Graduate Studies Office was commended by stakeholders for the quality and effectiveness of the pastoral care and advice for students, orientation, and support for scholarship holders and applicants.

The International Office was commended by stakeholders for support of international students, the strong student focus and for the flexibility in taking on roles and functions that would not normally be part of the function of such an office so that international students are not disadvantaged.

The Centre for Teaching & Learning collaborates very effectively with other units in student development and academic support and its approach to professional development for staff is to be commended.

The commitment to the students by the Placement Office is to be commended, and there is evidence of most effective relationships with external stakeholders.

The vision outlined in the Careers Development Centre SAR and the key elements of an employability strategy that bear directly on these points are to be commended.

6.3 Recommendations for Improvement

Whilst a significant number of comments and recommendations have been highlighted in the main report, the PRG has drawn the key recommendations together as below.

Recommendations: University level - overall resourcing and structures:

1. The PRG recommends that the university plan for additional resources for the Registrar's units in proportion to growth of the university.
2. The PRG considers that there is urgent need for introduction of flexibility in job roles to overcome the evident single points of failure in key administrative areas and functions.
3. The PRG recommends the University reviews current office structures within the area with a view to office integration, reducing duplication of activities, improving information and process flow, integrating databases and creating greater critical mass in staffing. Examples might include integrating Student Records, Registration, Academic Database, with the Examinations and Timetabling Office. The recommendation is consistent with the recent appointment of a Director of Registry.
4. The PRG recommends that the university undertake a process review to explore the possibilities of integrating processes to provide more effective function and effective one-stop-shop for under-graduate and graduate students and similarly for other stakeholder groups. The university should consider opportunities for relocation of offices to promote greater proximity of mutually supporting student-facing functions.
5. The PRG recommends that the Registrar consider creating separate leadership roles for International and Graduate Studies and where resources allow consider appointing a Head of Graduate Studies office.
6. It was evident that the level of responsibility and decision-making capacity of academic Departments may make it difficult for the university to drive strategy and for the offices in the area under review to deliver on their targets/KPIs and responsibilities and implement university policy. It is recommended that the university review the level of academic unit autonomy whilst recognising the need to retain appropriate elements of the 'Maynooth ethos'.

7. The PRG recommends the university to explore the benefits of providing greater levels of administrative autonomy to key academic administrative offices and strengthening the functions and responsibilities of Faculty Offices and Deans (along the lines of a greater executive and resource management function).
8. The PRG would also recommend the university consider creating staff development opportunities to allow cross-functional training and development and opportunities to evolve more integrated processes, workflows and hence help mediate the over-reliance on single individuals for critical functions.
9. The PRG recommends that the university consider a review and upgrading of the IT infrastructure that supports academic administration and emerging needs under the curriculum initiative and growth strategy in terms of online registration, timetabling, process approval tracking, electronic document production and the evolving academic database under the curriculum initiative.

Recommendations: systems and processes within the Registrar's area

10. The PRG recommends that the Registrar's area develop a coherent strategy built around the overall student life cycle from pre-entry, registration and orientation, and progression through the degree to graduation and exit from the university with supports and interventions identified at different stages and in an integrated way.
11. The PRG recommends the development of an Academic Policy and Regulations handbook to be placed on the online policy website and a timetable to develop SOPs. Full documentation within units would be beneficial as the university expands. The PRG believes that it is essential that agreement is reached on establishing single institutional data sets that are made available to all relevant stakeholders and offices.
12. The PRG recommends that the senior management in the area undertake process review to explore the possibilities of integrating processes to provide more effective function and effective one-stop-shop for graduate students and similarly for other stakeholder groups.
13. In view of significant criticism with some evidence of lack of compliance with university policy and the need for manual interventions and oversight, lack of buy in amongst some departments and an apparent lack of quality assurance of generic modules, the PRG would recommend a review of the delivery and management of structured PhD and management of PhD progression in the context of sectoral developments in this area.
14. During its consultations with stakeholders, it was clear to the PRG that the delivery of academic advice for students encountering difficulties was highly fragmented. It is recommended that the university mandate a single point as the first stage in advising such students. This point should ideally be located where easily accessible for all students.

15. The PRG recommends that the University consider that either the ITS system is modified to allow for the 3-level and double compensation elements to the regulations, which may or may not be possible, or that the regulations are changed to simplify the marks and standards to one level of compensation under a fully modularised structure (which will likely be necessary under the new curriculum initiative in any case). The PRG is extremely concerned at the potential risks posed by the current examination processes that require significant manual interventions throughout and with limited overall oversight at university level. In addition, the PRG recommends that the Examination Board process be reviewed to better assure standards and rigour in the examination process. The PRG was advised by the Computer Centre that it will not be possible in the short term (and within the time frame for introduction of the Curriculum initiative and increase in growth of the university) to implement a new IT system.

Unit level recommendations

16. Admissions Office:

The PRG recommends that the Admissions Office continue its development along the identified enhancements possibilities listed in the SAR, in particular the use of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system could prove an added-value in attracting more students.

17. Registry:

The PRG have identified a range of specific recommendations above that directly relate to the Registry, including systems and process review, staff resourcing, consideration of integration of office structures leading to greater critical mass and reduced risk of single critical points of failure. The PRG would further recommend the university consider creating staff development opportunities to allow cross-functional training and development and opportunities to evolve more integrated processes, workflows and hence help mediate the over-reliance on single individuals for critical functions.

18. Access Office:

The PRG recommends that the University ensure that recruitment targets are matched by adequate resourcing of its functions and those of supporting units. The way the Access Office interacts for the benefit of the students with other units can be a model to follow and ensure that all students can get a “one-stop-shop” experience when in need of assistance and support. The PRG supports the intention of the Access Office to continue to develop and track the progression path of specific student groups.

19. Graduate studies:

The PRG would support the suggestion made by the Office in their SAR, and recommends a review of current processes around administration and support of graduate students with a view towards greater integration and emergence of a one-stop-shop Graduate Studies Office and possibly consideration of the introduction of a Graduate School at Faculty or Institutional level.

The PRG also recommends a review of the structured PhD, the delivery, the management of PhD progression in the context of sectoral developments in this area, implementation and quality.

The PRG supports the proposal highlighted in the SAR and recommends that a university-or faculty level review of the portfolio of taught postgraduate programmes be undertaken, underpinned by the development of institutional policies governing the development and running of such programmes more in line with needs of the university.

20. International Office:

The PRG recommends that a review of the processes and structures relating to international students be undertaken to remove the constraints hampering the functioning and delivery of the Office in order to enhance the quality of the student experience and support the delivery of the ambitious strategic growth in international student numbers. The PRG would support the suggestion made by the Office in their SAR, and recommends a review of current processes around administration and support of international students with a view towards greater integration and emergence of a one-stop-shop Office.

21. Centre for Teaching and Learning:

The PRG recommends that the university further integrate the expertise in teaching and learning from the centre in the development of the new curricula. The centre has an impressive range of activities for both students and staff, the PRG considers that it will important for the strategic development of the university that the centre balance the support for teaching and learning, student support and the introduction of digital learning/new technologies.

22. Career Development Centre and Placement Office:

The PRG supports the recommendations for future areas of developments in the SAR. The PRG also recommends that the university strengthens its work to support student transition to employability by integrating the work of the Placement Office, the Career Development Centre and the Alumni Office to establish a forum to enhance the university's knowledge base for the benefit of the students. Such a move would be to the benefit of the university's strategic development.

PSG/HS/WK/TR/MD/AG 23-5-2015

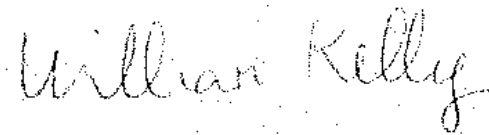
Professor Paul Giller
External Reviewer



Ms Hanne Smidt
External Reviewer



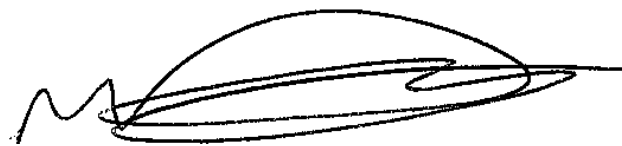
Mr William Kelly
External Reviewer




Mr Andrew Garrad
External Reviewer



Professor Michael Doherty
Internal Reviewer



Ms Terry Roche
Internal Reviewer



Appendix 1

**Quality Review Registry
Timetable
Tuesday 14th April 2015**

TIME	DETAIL	PURPOSE OF MEETING	VENUE	PRESENT
8.15am-9.00am	Depart Carton House Hotel			Paul Giller Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly
9.00am-9.15am	Meet President	Welcome to University	Presidents Boardroom	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad President
9.15am-9.45am	Welcome, Introduction & Tea/Coffee	Discuss quality review process, timetable, logistical issues & paperwork	Presidents Boardroom	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad Siobhan Harkin Jim Walsh
9.45am-10.00am	PRG Meeting		Presidents Boardroom	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
10.00am-11.00am	Aidan Mulkeen, VP Academic & Registrar	High level discussion on overarching issues	Presidents Boardroom	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad Aidan Mulkeen

PARALLEL SESSIONS				
11.00am-1.00pm	<p>Parallel Sessions 1 (Presidents Boardroom) 11-11.30 Michelle Berigan, Director of Registry & Conferrings</p> <p>11.30-12.00 Student Records & Registration (6) Ms Ann O'Shea, Student Records and Registration Officer Dr Adrienne Hobbs, Deputy Student Records and Registration Officer Ms Gretta Keogh, Administration Ms Enda Kelleher, Administration Ms Catherine Heffron, Administration Ms Marina Hanifin, Administration</p> <p>12-12.30 Examinations & Timetabling/External Examiners (6) Catherine O'Brien, Examinations and Timetabling Officer Kathleen McDermott, Administration Rachel Fagan, Administration Justine Brunton, Administration Linda Finnerty, Administration Brenda Wilson, Administration</p> <p>12.30-1.00 Academic Database Ms Ann McKeon, FOI/Data Protection</p>	<p>Parallel Sessions 2 (Registrars Conference Room) 11-12 Access Office (4) Rose Ryan, Director of Access Stephen Kennedy, Disability Officer Emer Sheerin, Mature Student Officer Colm Downes, Outreach Officer</p> <p>12-1 Centre for Teaching & Learning (8) Dr Una Crowley, Director Dr Alison Farrell, Teaching Development Officer Dr Catherine Mahon, Educational Development Officer Ms Margaret Phelan, eLearning support officer Ms Lisa O'Regan, eLearning Development Officer Ms Rose Donovan, Student Advisory Mr Eanan Strain, Careers Ms Clare Cullen, Administrator</p>	Presidents Boardroom/ Registrars Conference Room	<p>Parallel Session 1 (Presidents Boardroom) Paul Giller Michael Doherty Terry Roche</p> <p>Parallel Session 2 (Registrars Conference Room) Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad</p>
1.00pm-2.00pm	Lunch		Pugin/Reserved Table (6)	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
2.00pm-3.00pm	Rowena Pecchenino, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences Victor Lazzarini, Dean Faculty Arts Celtic Studies and Philosophy Fiona Lyddy, Dean Science and Engineering	Implications of new Curriculum for Registry and related offices	Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche

				Andy Garrad Rowena Pecchenino Victor Lazzarini Fiona Lyddy
3.00pm-5.30pm	<p>3.00-3.50 Graduate Studies Ronan Reilly, Dean International and Graduate Studies Andrea Valova, Graduate Studies Officer Marie Murphy, Graduate Studies Officer Eilis Murray, Graduate Studies Officer Conor Wilkinson, Administration Zoe Mulroy-Hehir, Administration</p> <p>3.50-4.40 Admissions John McGinnity, Admissions Officer/Assistant Registrar Sheila Purcell, Deputy Admissions Officer Kay Mitchell, Schools Liaison Officer Fiona Casey, Schools Liaison Officer Margaret Madden, Schools Liaison Officer Judith Caffrey, Schools Liaison Office & Digital Media Alice Normoyle, Administration Aiveen Cooper, Administration</p> <p>4.40-5.00 Coffee Break</p> <p>5.00-5.50 International Ronan Reilly, Dean International & Graduate Studies Alison Cooke, International Officer Helen Kirrane, International Officer Deirdre Dunne, Administration Claire Doran, International Officer Paul Mullally, International Officer Jodi Killackey, International Officer Wendy Cameron, Erasmus Officer Alena Jurikova, Erasmus Coordinator</p>		Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
7.30pm	Dinner		Carton House Hotel (5)	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Andy Garrad

Wednesday 15th April 2015

Time	Detail	Purpose of Meeting	Venue	Attending
8.15am-9.00am	Depart Carton House Hotel			Hanne Smidt Paul Giller Billy Kelly
9.00am-9.30am	PRG Meeting	Clarifications of expectations for later meetings. Any high level matters or documentation requiring attention	Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
PARALLEL SESSIONS				
9.30am-10.00am	Parallel Sessions 1 (Council Room) Final year/ reps from each faculty/ include placement students	Parallel Sessions 2 (Registrars Conference Room) Undergrad students 1 st year/ reps from each faculty	Council Room/RCR	Parallel Session 1 Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad Parallel Session 2 Paul Giller Michael Doherty Terry Roche
10.00am-10.30am	Postgraduate students Taught postgraduates	Postgraduate students Research postgraduates	Council Room/RCR	Parallel Session 1 Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad Parallel Session 2 Paul Giller Michael Doherty Terry Roche
10.30am-11am	Access students Mature students Disability students	International students Erasmus students JYA students Asian students	Council Room/RCR	Parallel Session 1 Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad Parallel Session 2 Paul Giller

				Michael Doherty Terry Roche
11am – 11.30am	Coffee		Council Room/RCR	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
11.30am- 12.15pm	Parallel Sessions 1 (Council Room) Academic Staff (HOD's) Marian Lyons (History) Adam Winstanley (Computer Science) Paul Moynagh (Biology) Peter McNamara (Business) Sharon Todd (Education)	Parallel Sessions 2 (Registrars Conference Room) Academic Staff (HOD's) Christopher Morris (Music) Josephine Finn (Adult & Community Ed) Stephen Buckley (Maths & Statistics) Jan Rigby (Geography) Valerie Heffernan (German)	Council Room/RCR	Parallel Session 1 Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad Parallel Session 2 Paul Giller Michael Doherty Terry Roche
12.15 -1.00	Departmental Administrators (Council Room) Neasa Hogan (Geography) Ann Donoghue (History) Marie Breen (Music) Jacqui Mullally (Anthropology) Grainne Roche (Exp. Physics)	Departmental Administrators (Registrars Conference Room) Fiona Cummins (German) Ann Gleeson (Philosophy) Grainne O'Rourke (Maths & Statistics) Maire Adderly (Economics Acc & Finance) Marie Hanley (Education)	Council Room/RCR	Parallel Session 1 Hanne Smidt Billy Kelly Andy Garrad Parallel Session 2 Paul Giller Michael Doherty Terry Roche
1.00-2.00	Lunch		Pugin/Reserved Table (6)	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
2.00pm- 2.30pm	Parallel Sessions 1 (Council Room) Michael Rafter, Director of Campus & Commercial Services Andrew Moloney, Campus Services/IT	Parallel Sessions 2 (Presidents Boardroom) Careers Natasha Marron, Careers Advisor Eanan Strain, Careers Advisor	Council Room/President Boardroom	Paul Giller Terry Roche Andy Garrad Michael Rafter Andrew Moloney Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Natasha Marron Eanan Strain

2.30pm-3pm	Computer Centre Brian Carolan, Director Computer Centre Rory Hopkins, Manager Information Systems	Placement Paula Murray, Placement Officer Martina Bourgoïn, Administration	Council Room/President Boardroom	Paul Giller Terry Roche Andy Garrad Brian Carolan Rory Hopkins Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Paula Murray Martin Bourgoïn
3.00-3.30pm	John McCormack, Student Fees and Grants		Council Room/President Boardroom	Paul Giller Terry Roche Andy Garrad John McCormack
4.00-4.45	External Stakeholders Guidance Counsellors 4.00-4.15 Mr Brian McCarthy, St Peters College Dunboyne/attending 4.15-4.30 Ms Catherine Gannon, Dunshaughlin Community College phone call (086 1063441) Employers/Placement 4.30-4.45 Ms Cathy Watts, University Relations EMEA, State Street Corporation, Global Human Resources (Ph: 776 4376)		Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
5.15pm – 6.15pm	Tour of Campus			Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Andy Garrad Jim Walsh
7.30pm	Dinner		Carton House Hotel (4)	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Terry Roche

Thursday 16th April 2015

Time	Detail	Purpose of Meeting	Venue	Attending
8.15am-9.00am	Depart Carton House Hotel			Hanne Smidt Paul Giller Billy Kelly
9.00am-12.00 Noon	Prepare for exit presentation		Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
12.00-1.00	Lunch		Pugin/Reserved Table (6)	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
1.00-3.30	Preparation for exit presentation		Council Room	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Hanne Smidt Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad
3.30-4.00	Exit Presentation		Renehan/confirmed	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad All staff of Registry and associated units
4.00-5.00	Reception		Renehan/confirmed	Paul Giller Billy Kelly Michael Doherty Terry Roche Andy Garrad All staff of Registry and associated units