

FINANCE FUNCTION

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

(a response to the finding of the Peer Review Group Report dated 15th December 2017).

INTRODUCTION

The Senior Management Team in the finance function would like to formally record its gratitude to the members of the PRG. We fully accept the comments outlined and have agreed, following some lengthy discussion, to attempt to implement each of the recommendations as they affect the finance function. It is proposed to complete this work before the beginning of 2020.

The QIP is supported by a detailed implementation plan which outlines the improvements or enhancements proposed by Finance in transaction processing, the exercise of internal financial control or reporting. The actions are set out in terms of the overall finance function and then each constituent unit is addressed.

The Senior Management Team in the finance function trust the QIP is clear and understood by the reader. Should you require any clarification or explanation, do not hesitate to contact mike.omalley@mu.ie.

Strategic Recommendations – University Executive

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
S.1	The University approve the development of a Resource Allocation Model (RAM) for the allocation of financial resources, with the annual application of the model led by the Bursars Office.	A RAM should be developed to ensure alignment of the allocation of financial resources with the Academic & Strategic Plan, assist in academic profiling and planning and provide clarity, transparency and greater understanding of the financial budgetary process.	MU has had a budget allocation model for many years. It distributes non-pay budgets and occasional pay budgets to Departments and Units. Work towards an all-encompassing RAM began 3-4 years ago. The implementation of a RAM has proved difficult as it attempts to balance clear and simple incentives for departments with the uncertainties inherent in funding. This became further confused when different members of UE proposed different structures for a RAM model. Finance will continue to support the UE to further develop the RAM and resolve the different approaches during 2018/19.

S.2	The University should consider the appropriateness of breadth of responsibility of the current Bursar/ Secretary position.	PRG make this recommendation in the context of the recent growth of the University, heightened governance requirements, reduced exchequer funding and the need to ensure the Bursar can provide full focus and leadership to financial sustainability of the University.	The Bursar and Secretary will discuss this finding with the President in the summer of 2018.
S.3	The University should develop risk registers at Units below University level to ensure all risks are captured.	Risks may not always be captured at a University level. We would encourage the roll out of risk register process to all levels within the University to ensure a risk culture is embedded.	Agreed. MU will transition during 2018/19 and make an agreed set of Risk Registers mandatory from 2019.

Whole of Unit Recommendations – Finance Leadership (Bursar, Senior Management Team & Executive)

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
U.1	Develop a Finance Office Annual Operational Plan to ensure alignment with University plan with each sub-unit contribution to the overall Finance Office plan defined.	This would assist clarity and understanding of overall and sub-unit objectives and further develop a shared understanding of priorities.	Agreed. We will prepare a plan for 2018/19.
U.2	Formal Training, Performance Review, Professional development and mentoring should be developed for staff in a structured way for all members of the Finance team.	The PRG view this as assisting staff realising their own career ambition and further release the potential in staff.	Performance Review is a University wide issue and will be addressed once HR bring forward proposals for the re-implementation of PMDS. In the meantime, we will carry out a

			<p>standalone review with the professional accountants in the function during Q1 2018/19.</p> <p>We will finalise a training plan by the end of 2018. This will address all finance function personnel.</p> <p>Professional Development will be (and is) encouraged.</p> <p>Mentoring will be looked at in 2019.</p>
U.3	Ensure rollout and filling of new proposed Finance Office structure with the SMT empowered to lead their functional responsibilities.	The PRG were greatly encouraged by the planned new structure and would particularly support the continued move to the Business Partnering model.	Agreed. Complete in 2018.
U.4	Finish the pilot of Purchase Ordering Processing (POP) and roll out across the University. Engage with IT Support to ensure business and financial processes are reviewed, “leaned” and fit for purpose.	Ensure return is got from recent JDE investment and deliver operational efficiencies across all business processes.	Agreed. A pilot will operate from the end Jun 2018 with full planning for roll-out completed by Dec 2018.
U.5	Immediately implement regular Finance team meetings to facilitate two way communication with more frequent team meetings taking place at unit	The PRG would suggest that this would initially be developed using external facilitation to ensure such meeting deliver the benefits within the Finance team and within the wider University.	Agreed. External facilitation will be sourced through the Procurement Office in Q1 2018/19.

	level, and in time, consider the development of broader communication strategy for the Office.		
U.6	Update website to provide clarity of all team roles and contact points.	PRG believes this would greatly assist the team in engagement with its internal customers.	Agreed. This will be concluded during 2018.
U.7	Further instil and develop a Customer Service culture and ethos within the Finance team through regular proactive engagement and feedback from all stakeholders.	The new structure will greatly enhance the team's ability to engage with its internal customers and further respond to their requirements.	Agreed. Customer service training will be provided as part of the training programme. In addition, the customer experience in Fees improved by the addition of two user support terminals for on-line customer service purposes. Initiatives to allow better student/customer interactions through the web will be explored. Specific CST will be provided before end 2018. Ultimately, the Finance Function would wish to be perceived as having a strong Customer Service Culture and this will be re-examined after the completion of the above initiatives.
U.8	Engage and meet with customers on internal reporting requirements and consider the introduction of commentaries, charts, financial forecasts, and integrated reporting with Student, Estates, Research and Human Resource system to enable the Finance function become the "go to"	Recommended in the context that all strategic and operational decisions need to consider the financial implication of those decisions. We would envisage this being led by the Financial Planning Team supported by the Bursar's Office.	Working with Registry, Estates, Research and Human Resources, we will develop our capability in data analysis and presentation. We will improve through training and the use of best-in-class tools. This will be an interactive

	place for all of the University decision making information needs.		process with steady improvement year on year. To date we have trained our user community as part of the roll-out of the Business Partner model. In addition, end user training is available on-line for the completion of occasional timesheets and self-service expenses. Also, specialist training has been provided to budget-holders and administrators on all systems and processes.
U.9	Introduce a virtual help desk as one point of contact point for all internal customers to Finance.		This will be examined during 2018/19.

Financial Planning

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	Continue the investment and rollout of this aspect of the Finance structures.	The PRG welcome and acknowledge the significant progress made recently in this area.	Complete in 2018.
2.	Consider in time, the development of Business Partner for each of the key Academic and Research delivery areas of the University.	As the University grows in size and complexity, the need for financial understanding and awareness will increase.	We will carry out a review in 2019.

Fees & Grants

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	The physical working environment needs to be improved for both staff and students.	The PRG are conscious that this may well be the first on campus interface a student has with the University in making this recommendation. The location is not particularly suitable for students with disabilities.	Complete. With the support of the Director of Campus and Commercial Services, a major upgrade in facilities took place over the summer of 2018. It is now a facility the university can be proud of.
2.	There needs to be regular team meetings between the Fees Team and the System Controller.	This would aid communication and inclusiveness issues in the team.	Agreed. Regular meetings already being held and will continue into the future.
3.	The Fees Manager should introduce a structured regular meeting with colleagues from Registry and Admission , particularly around the busy beginning of the academic year period.	This would aid communication and ease some of the frustrations seen by the PRG in the team.	Agreed. The Bursar will engage with the Registrar and they will run these meetings jointly.

Payroll

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	Consider the frequency of payroll payments, particularly weekly files with a view optimising already very tight resources and a stretched team.	While already, extremely efficient, this could further improve efficiency and ease pressure on the small payroll team	We will take this up with staff unions during 2018.
2.	Introduce regular meetings with Human Resources colleagues to ensure there is a shared understanding of the full recruitment to pay process.	The PRG believe this is of particular importance given the HR role in employee set up.	Agreed. We have already introduced such meetings and will continue with them for the future.
3.	Continue the oversight and roll out of the new on-line Part time pay approval model.	This would further assist the efficient operation of payroll processing.	Agreed. We will roll-out to 'unit rate' and 'fixed rate' employees during 2018 and early 2019.

Accounts Receivable

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	Develop an automated interface for MyCard, TCAS and Shop for the JDE financial systems.	Eliminate manual processes.	We will begin to plan for these in 2018/19.
2.	In conjunction with the Head of Financial Operations, introduce and improved system and process for the allocation of income.	The PRG view that this would greatly assist budget holders in assessing their available income and significantly facilitate the RAM development.	Noted. We will begin to plan for this in 2018/19.

Accounts Payable

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	Proactively support the roll out of POP.	Essential for control and e-business.	Pilot by Jun 2018 and full roll-out planning to be completed by Dec 2018.
2.	The team need to be supported in their drive to improve customer service via a small investment in a scanner to assist in archiving and operational efficiency.		Agreed. Already in train.
3.	Job descriptions need to be defined and clear to ensure there is clarity and understanding of roles.		We will mandate the new AP Supervisor to do this by Q2 2019.

Financial Reporting

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Timeline
1.	Investigate the possibility of having the University's subsidiaries hosted and run on JDE, automating all inter-company transactions.	Whilst already recognised as a model of effectiveness, this would further assist consolidation, inter-company reconciliations and audit timeliness.	Agreed. We will examine in 2018/19.
2.	Formalise the feedback of Internal Audit reviews to Departments and University Executive.		Agreed. We will examine in 2018/19.