

Quality Review: Registry and Associated units. Response to the Peer Review Report, and QIP. June 2016

Maynooth University initiated a Quality Review of the university registry and the suite of units which, at the time, reported to the Registrar. The student services, including medical and counselling services, chaplaincy, sports, and student accommodation, were the subject of a separate quality review. The units reviewed included:

- Student Records Office.
- Examinations and Timetable office.
- External Examiners' office.
- Academic Database office.
- Conferring office.
- Admissions Office.
- Access Office.
- Graduate Studies Office.
- International Office.
- Centre for Teaching and Learning and Academic Advisory Office.
- Placement Office.
- Career Development Centre.

This wide ranging review was designed to provide an insight into the interaction between units, and the coherence of the service to students, which is more difficult to achieve in separate reviews. It also was undertaken to benchmark the work of the units with best practice in other institutions through the channel of external peer review.

Resources: The PRG noted that collectively, the units reviewed had low staffing levels, given the complexity of the task and the number of students involved. The report recommended that staffing should grow in proportion to student numbers. The report also recommended a rebalancing of staffing, and observed that undergraduate Admissions office and the Access office seemed more appropriately staffed than the registry units, the Graduate Studies office and International office. It is the university strategy to grow staffing in support areas as student numbers grow. However, given the resource constraints, and the efficiencies of scale, it is planned as a general principle to grow academic staff in proportion to student growth, and to grow administrative and support staff at approximately 80% of the rate of student growth.

Procedures: The review group noted that many of the operational procedures were not always well documented, resulting in an over-dependence on the tacit knowledge of individual staff members, and causing a risk of inconsistency. A project to streamline and document processes and procedures

is currently underway. This process is expected to result in improved consistency of service to students, streamlining of handling of transactions, and greater flexibility in deployment of staff.

Integration of services: The review group observed that the services are fragmented into a large number of small units, sometimes with overlapping responsibilities. It recommends that 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. Work is already underway to respond to this recommendation. The registry units (Student Records, Examinations and Timetable Office, External Examiners Office, Academic Database Office and Conferring Office) are being integrated into a Registry team, under a Director of Registry. While the distinct functions remain, the Registry will have the ability to move staff between the teams to respond to peak periods in each function. There is also an acknowledged need to align processes with relation to postgraduate students and international students. This work is also underway, but at an earlier stage.

The following sections tabulate the specific recommendations of the review groups, and the university responses to each.

Recommendations: University level - overall resourcing and structures:

No	Recommendation	Response
1	The PRG recommends that the university plan for additional resources for the Registrar's units in proportion to growth of the university.	The university strategy is that staffing in administrative areas will grow as students numbers grow. Growth is not expected to be directly proportional to student numbers, as there should be some economics of scale and benefits accruing from investments in systems, and therefore as a general principle staffing in support areas is expected to grow at approximately 80% of the rate of student growth.
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.	It is acknowledged that there are multiple small units creating a vulnerability to absence/illness. This configuration also creates difficulties in responding to seasonal peaks in workload. The registry organisational structure is being revised with a view to (i) greater flexibility of roles, (ii) some mobiles staff working in multiple areas, and (iii) greater documentation of operating procedures to enlarge the number or people who can deal with each task.
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.	As above, this is in progress. The units mentioned all form part of Registry, but have in the past functioned as separate units. Work is underway to build a stronger shared identity, share staff across these units, and coordinate process and procedures.

No	Recommendation	Response
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.	<p>Processes are currently under review, and a dedicated officer has been appointed to assist in this task. The initial emphasis is on the process changes needed to enable the planned curriculum changes.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that physical relocation could assist in promotion of consistent services to students. Long term opportunities for relocation are being developed as part of the campus master plan. In the shorter term, some interim realignment may assist in this process.</p>
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.	This is has been agreed and separate positions advertised.
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'.	<p>It is acknowledged that academic departments have evolved different practices. A project is underway to agree a harmonised set of marks and standards. Further work will be needed to harmonise academic procedures in matters such as attendance, late submission and responses to illness and personal difficulties of students.</p> <p>Many academic departments currently make their own admission decisions for postgraduate and international students. It is acknowledged that this sometimes results in delays, and consequent loss of potential students. The university will consider ways to improve the efficiency of this process, and the possibility of a centralised admissions function for postgraduate and international students.</p>
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).	The role of Deans and the supporting offices is likely to be reviewed. It is noted that they currently play a more limited role in academic administration that in many other universities. In particular it is expected that Deans will play a stronger role in reviewing and developing the portfolio of programmes.

No	Recommendation	Response
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.	It is acknowledged that it would be desirable to broaden the skill set of staff to enable more flexible deployment, particularly at peak times. Work is underway to (i) agree more flexible roles within registry, (ii) introduce documented procedures, and (iii) build skills to enable staff mobility across units.
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.	Upgrading of the IT infrastructure is underway. Some upgrades will be in place in September 2016, and a second phase will be in place in 2017.

Recommendations: systems and processes within the Registrar's area

No	Recommendation	Response
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.	It is acknowledged that further work is needed to ensure a seamless set of supports and services to students. A series of priority actions are currently underway including (i) enhanced programme advice, (ii) streamlined registration and orientation, (iii) clarification and documentation of processes post-registration. A more comprehensive full life-cycle suite of services can be developed as resources become available.
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.	<p>Work to develop a documented set of policies and procedures is underway. It is the intention to publish these for use by all relevant units.</p> <p>Work is also underway, under the leadership of the VPSQ, through the Institutional Research Office to develop standard data sets.</p>
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.	Work is underway to align the processes in GSO and registry to provide a more seamless service.
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.	The GSO has reviewed aspects of the structured PhD. A fuller review is expected under the leadership of the incoming Dean of Graduate Studies.

No	Recommendation	Response
14	<p>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.</p>	<p>The university has agreed to strengthen and resource additional advisory supports for students. A post of programme advisor has been created, and guidance materials for students are being developed.</p>
15	<p>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).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>The Marks and Standards have been revised and simplified, removing the complex two-level compensation. Modifications to the IT system to automate grading and eliminate many of the manual interventions are underway.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that the current examination process required significant manual intervention. The changes to marks and standards will significantly reduce this, and allow grading to be more automated.</p> <p>While the existing examination processes are onerous and labour intensive, the university is satisfied that the current process has been reliable and accurate.</p> <p>The current examination system involves oversight at three levels: First internal exam boards are chaired by heads of department. Second, the results are reviewed by external examiners approved by Faculty. Third, the final results are reviewed at University exam boards.</p> <p>While it is not realistic to introduce a new IT system, there is a substantial IT project underway to modify the existing system to meet the requirements of the new curriculum and processes.</p>

Unit level recommendations

No	Recommendation	Response
16	<p>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.</p>	<p>The Admissions office plans to continue and develop its work along these lines.</p> <p>It plans to continue the successful growth strategy which has underpinned the development of the university in recent years.</p>
17	<p>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.</p>	<p>In the period since the quality review, there has been (i) additional recruitment, (ii) greater integration of the small units in registry, (iii) initiation of a project to document processes and build staff capacity, and (iv) initiation of a project to modify the IT systems.</p>
18	<p>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.</p>	<p>The Access office staffing has grown steadily in recent years, and certain functions have been mainstreamed. Nevertheless, further growth is anticipated.</p> <p>The Access office is working to develop data systems to track student progression. This may require modifications to the student records system.</p> <p>The report identified the accessibility of the campus as an issue. It worth be worth noting that three audits have now been carried out and significant work is planned to develop a University wide response to this issue.</p>

No	Recommendation	Response
19	<p>Graduate studies:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Work is underway to review processes, and ensure better alignment of registry and GSO processes.</p> <p>The GSO has reviewed aspects of the structured PhD. Substantial work has also been done in review of the postgraduate portfolio and analysis of enrolment.</p> <p>Further work is planned in review and development of the portfolio.</p>
20	<p>International Office:</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the current processes are not fully aligned and constrain the efforts of the International Office. Work will be undertaken to streamline processes. This will involve the International Office, Registry, Fees and Graduate Studies offices.</p> <p>The IO will also undertake work with academic departments and support units to increase engagement in the internationalisation agenda. Initial meetings with several departments have taken place. Meetings with remaining academic departments and support units will take place in the next academic year with a view to identifying practices across all internal stakeholder groups to ensure a quality international-student experience.</p>

No	Recommendation	Response
21	<p>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.</p>	<p>The university recognises the need to ensure a balance of activities in CTL, while retaining its core focus on enhancing teaching and learning in the university.</p> <p>CTL has been responsible for the development and implementation of the new Critical Skills programme for first year students. It has also taken responsibility for the development of programme advice for students.</p> <p>A Dean of Teaching and Learning has been appointed, filling a post which had been vacant for 6 years.</p>
22	<p>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.</p>	<p>It is the intention to coordinate and align the work of the CDC, the placement office and the experiential learning office, under the leadership of the Dean of Teaching and Learning. It is not immediately anticipated that these units will be merged, but this may be reconsidered in the longer term.</p>

Appendix: Extracts from responses from individual units which contributed to the QIP

Registry

The Registry units support the views of the PRG of the benefits of greater integration of units across the area (pp. 8, 11, 13 & 19). We agree with the PRG suggestion of co-location of Registry units, and the opportunities it would bring for greater integration, cohesion and ultimately a more streamlined student service.

We have commenced a major Registry systems project which will address some of the difficulties and constraints we have been dealing with. The re-designed systems will reduce the number and scale of manual interventions and processes needed. The introduction of data integration between systems will reduce, to a minimum, the duplication of effort required. The upgrade of this will eliminate the need for departments to perform manual examinations calculations; this process will be fully automated by 2017.

Registry staff are keenly aware of the risks associated with key single points of failure (pp. 6 & 13). The recent recruitment drive will allow us commence the process of addressing this issue although we recognise that it will take a period of time to bring staff up to the required level of expertise.

Student Records and Registration

The PRG considers that there is urgent need for the introduction of flexibility in job roles (p.9) to overcome the evident single points of failure in key administrative areas and functions. The response of the Student Records and Registration Officer is that all staff in Student Records will be absolutely flexible in terms of job function going forward to lessen the risk of such single points of failure.

Observing that the Student Records and Registration Office undertakes a range of activities that appear to relate to the functions of other offices such as PAC, Adult Education, ERASMUS, International students, and that a relatively high level of manual intervention was apparent, the PRG contends that this poses considerable risk to quality assurance. It also increases the workloads of already overstretched staff. The PRG state that "... 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" (p.13). The response here is that Student Records will always have a role to play in all of the above mentioned areas since it is crucial that the information we receive is accurate. It is proposed to work with these areas to identify improvements in workflows.

Recommendation iii (p.10) concerns an urgent need for review and upgrading of the IT infrastructure that supports academic administration in MU. The Student Records and Registration Officer notes that this is currently being addressed through the Adapt Project, ADB integration and the new Timetable.

The PRG recommendation that an Academic Policy and Regulations handbook, a timetable of SOPs and full documentation between units (p.10) be developed will be addressed through the recent

appointment of a Policy, Process and Planning Officer, coupled with the co-operation and assistance of staff across the various areas.

Examinations and Timetabling

Recommendation 15 (p.21) states that: *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).*

Both of these approaches are being considered. However, there are a number of drawbacks. Firstly, changes to Marks and Standards have not, as of January 2016, been approved. Secondly, pending their approval, they will either be approved for implementation from 2016/17 onwards for first years *or* 2016/17 for first *and* second years. Either approach will result in many years of continuing to grapple with manual, cumbersome and somewhat risky exam upload facilities.

External Examiner

The External Examiner Office agrees with the PRG findings in relation to single points of failure being an area of major concern. The PRG comments that single points of failure pose a risk to the “quality of provision and supports in some units/functions” (p.6). The External Examiner Office remains concerned in relation to this key point going forward.

Academic Database Officer

Responding to the PRG’s observations that the [Timetabling] and Academic Database are “delivered by single staff members” and that these functions represent critical single points of failure within the entire academic programme administration” (p.13), the implication of the new Curriculum and the proposed project plan will mean that the Academic Database Office will be working *with* the Student Records and Registration Office even more closely than heretofore, and equally Student Records with the Academic Database Office. Furthermore, additional Registry staff have recently been recruited; thus there will now be more than one person involved in the work of the Academic Database Office.

The PRG observes that the “process integration would be beneficial to the quality of delivery and to reducing risk in key processes” (p.13). Such integration is currently being addressed, and indeed will continue to be addressed. It is hoped that by September 2016, process integration in relation to the Academic Database will be at least in part delivered upon.

Admissions Office

The meeting with the Peer Review Group allowed for constructive engagement with the key priorities and challenges facing the Office in the coming years. The specific areas which are noted, in response to the Quality Review and Assurance process, may be detailed as follows:

The Maynooth Curriculum

The PRG report recognises the significant development which the new Maynooth Curriculum provides for students; indeed a step-change in the student experience. The Admissions Office has actively engaged in promoting the various initiatives and availed of the information sessions which have enhanced our understanding of the benefits which accrue. We have had and continue to have team sessions to explore aspects of the new curriculum as it rolls out so it is communicated effectively to key audiences. Importantly there is mutual support within the team understanding and answering any questions we may have on how it benefits our students.

An area of major concern is that the required supports are put in place to assist students as they make their choices given the enhanced flexibility for them to ensure we continue the positive reputation and ethos of Maynooth. Successful implementation of our curriculum initiative will assist in driving future undergraduate student growth.

Front Office

During the self assessment review exercise we identified the need to provide an easier access point for prospective students and, with the co-operation of colleagues in Registry and the Deans' Office, we have moved the front office to the first office on the corridor. This provides for an improved user experience in visiting the Office. It has a much more professional and welcoming style and the provision of publications and other material is well laid out and easily accessible.

Schools' Liaison activity

To date, since September 2015, we have visited 257 schools, and over 50 careers exhibitions, to promote the university, our new curriculum and the university's subjects and degrees. We are currently reviewing that engagement to ensure its success as well as analysing other fertile ground outside this network to build relationships and future student growth (e.g. through the provision of 5th year talks in schools that do not have 6th year talks – our focus has been on 6th year given short time lag to CAO application).

Prospective Student Relationship Management System (CRM)

The PRG recommend that the Admissions Office continue its development of the CRM as a way of attracting more students (p.21). We have benefitted significantly from the introduction of CRM, albeit that there has been a large workload in understanding its functionality and using it to its optimal levels. This is an ongoing process as we integrate more and more aspects of the Hobson's product e.g. introducing App Review (AR) for mature student assessment in 2016, in addition to sports scholarship applications on Apply Yourself (AY) for the first time.

Career Exhibitions: In order to increase the level of engagement with prospective students and importantly the number of CRM contacts we acquire at career exhibitions we have increased the number of personnel at each career exhibition. This has been necessitated for two reasons; firstly, a noticeable increase in volume of queries occurred after the transition of Froebel to us but unfortunately their exhibition person did not transfer to us. Secondly there is a need for additional personnel at each exhibition so as to initially engage with prospective students before adding their contact details on our ipads. The two exhibition ambassadors who work with us on an occasional basis have enhanced significantly the contacts obtained on CRM over previous years (so far for 2016 we have 941 contacts which is more than double previous numbers).

Wider Digital Strategy

The continued use of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was particularly mentioned as an important digital medium, for attracting more students to the University, in the Peer Review Group's report. The team wishes to confirm its commitment to developing a digital strategy that is current and, more importantly, which mirrors the communication platforms currently used by potential applicants. To this end, daily communication with potential applicants is made via the more established social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook), via the University website, and increasingly via our fledgling presence on Snapchat and our undergraduate blog (Tumblr). These channels re-enforce the work we do in our publications and on the web.

Advice for students encountering difficulties

We acknowledge that there are various offices which support students in difficulty and understand that it is not satisfactory if students receive different information from different offices. We understand that revised structures are being considered to support academic advice for the new curriculum. However, it is important that students wishing to change course seek advice from the Admissions Office given that information in relation to course capacity across the university and criteria on student eligibility to transfer resides in the Admissions Office. These interactions with students also play an important role in student retention. We would welcome the opportunity to engage with the other Offices to ensure that the information provided to our students is consistent, especially given flexibility in our new curriculum.

Lack of Stakeholder Surveys

The PRG report noted that there was a lack of stakeholder surveys (p.7). We did not undertake surveys specifically for the Self Assessment Report (SAR) given prior discussions regarding the framing of the overall process. However, as part of our ongoing processes we seek comments from visitors at open days (e.g. through 'feedback boxes') and continuously receive comments in relation to all of the activities which we undertake with schools as well as internal and external stakeholders.

The Admissions Office welcomes the review and is clear on the challenges we face in working with the rest of the university to achieve the ambitious growth targets in undergraduate student numbers planned for in coming years. The PRG noted that the success of the Office is '...recognised internally and externally based on strong relationships with both external and internal stakeholders..' (p.12).

A strong team dynamic permeates across the Office, in which there is clear identification to working together to achieve the university's goals. This supports the initiatives we have undertaken in the past and is an important competitive strength as we promote the new curriculum, initiate developments in CRM and extend relationships with key stakeholders.

Access Office

The Access Team were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in a quality review of Registry and associated units. The team in the Access Office were heartened by the positive feedback from the Peer Review visit and appreciative of the high praise for the various units.

The need for improved IT infrastructure is critical and the capacity of the university to track and report on target groups in a systemised way has been highlighted as a weakness and needs to be progressed and prioritised. The recommendation in the report to improve IT infrastructure would also support improved administrative efficiencies and this should also be regarded as critical.

The need for a more accessible physical campus has also been identified as a priority.

The key issue for the Access Office has, and continues to be, more engagement internally with the university around embedding diversity strategies into the heart of the university. This issue is timely as it is reiterated as a key principle in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015). A key theme in this Plan is how access is now 'everyone's business'. .. to meet the needs of a more diverse student body, more strategic and holistic approaches are now required. **The access mission must be fully integrated across all faculties and areas of work in institutions**, and this will help us achieve an improved experience and better outcome for all students in higher education (Preface, John Hennessy, Chair, HEA. 2015, HEA). This is an issue that needs to be specifically reflected in the QIP by each unit within and also units external to Registry. The development of "one stop shops" with more integrated functions as well as a coherent shared strategy built around the overall student life cycle with supports and interventions identified at different stages and delivered in an integrated way could be very important outputs from this review. An enhanced academic advisory function is also of key importance. This needs to be done while acknowledging that we also need to ensure that widening participation issues are not lost in the greater issues of the university.

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. **Comment:** Opportunities to upskill are also important as well as the opportunity to move between units which would share expertise and create greater awareness of the demands of different units. This recommendation should also be linked to the potential of "one stop shops" as well as to the development of the Student Hub which is based in Student Services.

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 undergraduate 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. **Comment:** Having student facing functions in one location would be beneficial. Consideration of locating all key services in one area rather than a graduate hub for

example might be a stronger proposal. The opportunity to locate student supports in the Student Hub which is being developed as part of Student Services might be key.

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. **Comment:** It would be useful to also consider providing the opportunity for staff to have placements in other colleges where they could share information and bring learning back to their own units.

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.

Comment: The availability of institutional data relating to target groups was identified as a key issue in the Quality Review (2011). Data collection, analysis and reporting are one of the five goals outlined in the National Access Plan (2015). MAP has despite intensive efforts still not been able to systematically identify, track and monitor and report on the identified target groups with regard to their admission, retention and progression rates (QIP 2011 Recommendation 1). The IT infrastructure in the University makes it difficult to pull reliable, comparable data in a systemised and timely manner. Lack of comprehensive data on the retention and progression of target groups in particular is a key weakness.

The Access Office needs to continue to develop a research programme in the area of widening participation, equality and lifelong learning in collaboration with the academic community (QIP 2011 Recommendation 3). The Access Office needs the capacity to track, monitor and evaluate all initiatives, programmes, projects and activities. We require capacity to report on quantitative data as well as the views of students and graduates which was also identified as a key issue in the National Access Plan (2015). This will support the development of a strong evidence base for key strategic decisions and the development of any future programmes and initiatives.

The provision of good quality data, the ability to analyse trends and project growth as well as the ability to proactively advise vulnerable students and track supports that impact on retention, progression and transfer is currently severely limited by the university IT infrastructure.

In addition there are severe limitations in the IT infrastructure available to support significant administrative tasks, for example the administration of the Student Assistance Fund in the Access Office. The development of a Maynooth University suite of tools to support identified administrative functions would dramatically improve the efficiency of the administration of such tasks and free up time for other work.

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. **Comment:** This would lead to an improved experience for students and better sharing of resources. It is critical that the support needs of all students are recognised and appropriately resourced, wherever possible through

mainstream delivery which reflects and is also respectful of the diversity of the student population. The concept of the “one stop shop” is of real value and needs to be further developed.

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. **Comment:** The Access Office supports priority students as identified by the University and the HEA as they make the transition to, through and beyond University. First generation college entrants, students with disabilities and mature students as well as other targeted equity groups can face unique challenges in the university environment. The post-entry supports developed by the Access Office are aimed at achieving equity of participation while supporting students to develop as independent learners. An integrated academic advising experience for students as they navigate daily life at university is necessary to ensure all students achieve their potential.

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. **Comment:** It might be worth noting that information on student’s accommodations for examinations (for students with disabilities) are also problematic as they are not provided to students individually as part of the system. It would be useful if this issue could also be resourced /addressed so that it can improve the student experience.

Centre for Teaching and Learning and Academic Advisory

Following the meeting with members of the peer review group (PRG), staff from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) looked forward to reading and discussing the appraisals and recommendations proposed by the panel. Given the breadth of the review which related to a wide range of administrative units, we recognise that it was not possible to address in detail in the report all of the various aspects of our work here in CTL. Thus, we welcome and value the comments made by the PRG in relation to the supports, initiatives, activities and services that we provide.

Since the publication of the PRG report, CTL has been responsible for designing, promoting, teaching, assessing and evaluating the new critical skills modules for first year students which were launched as part of the Curriculum Initiative. Over 200 students opted to study one of the three critical skills modules in its pilot semester (September 2015 – December 2015). Considerable time, work and resources are needed to complete the academic and administrative tasks associated with running and delivering these modules on such a large scale. If, as intended, the critical skills modules are to become a mainstay of the first year curriculum, it will be essential that sufficient resources are

made available to allow the modules to continue to thrive and be of benefit for students. Drawing on the experiences from the initial year of the modules, the Centre would be able to advise on likely resources needed for sustaining provision.

General recommendations

In terms of possible changes/ improvements that could be made to the academic database during the recommended review and upgrading, CTL would like to suggest that it would be useful if the academic database could be designed to centrally capture who is responsible for teaching each module as this information is required when updating Moodle in preparation for each new academic year. To date, CTL has gathered this information on a yearly basis through spreadsheets distributed to each academic department. Once the spreadsheets are returned with the names of staff teaching the modules, we can manually set up and enrol the staff members on the relevant Moodle pages. The current manual process is very time-consuming. If the academic database contained details of the teaching staff for each module, Moodle could be programmed to automatically sync with the academic database and this would negate the need for manual spreadsheets. Consequently, this could improve module data management and speed up staff/ teacher enrolment in Moodle. Perhaps most importantly, this would also reduce the Moodle Support time spent on manual spreadsheets, thereby enabling Moodle Support to focus more on enhancement activities.

As described in the SAR completed by CTL, the Academic Advisory Office presently offers registered and future Maynooth University students (and their parents) a convenient first point of contact should they wish to seek advice or assistance with any aspect of their general experience of university life. Once the reason for the approach has been established through the discussion of the query, concern or issue, the Academic Advisory Office can initiate and oversee the process to secure the student the support, help or information that he or she needs. Frequently, this will entail liaising with other support services, academic or administrative departments.

Over the past four years, face-to-face visits to the Academic Advisory Office have increased each year, and currently exceed over 1,000 visits across an academic year (please note that this figure does not include repeated visits, nor take account of telephone or email contact/ advisory correspondence). We have additionally cultivated a wealth of information about some of the challenges experienced by undergraduate students, particularly regarding the factors that may impact on the decision to remain at, or withdraw from, university. Taking into account all of the experiences in the area of student support and advice accrued to date, we feel that the Academic Advisory Office is ideally positioned to contribute to and inform the recommendation made by the PRG to review how and where students who may need assistance with any aspect of university life can obtain this support. Indeed, a similar point was made by the PRG on page 16 of the report when they stated: *“The Academic Advisory Office has a specific role in advising and assisting students who may encounter difficulties in their programmes of study.”*

Centre for Teaching and Learning proposed plan of action in response to the PRG report

In light of the PRG report, we intend to develop our own clear and concise strategy for CTL that covers the life of the University Strategic Plan. By preparing such a document (that will be aligned with the goals stipulated in the aforementioned plan), we hope that this will enable us to prioritise our work and begin to address the issue of further integration into institutional policies, whilst

maintaining our flexibility to support and advise on student- and staff- identified needs, and finding a balance between being proactive and not excessively reactive. Bearing in mind the ongoing changes in this area, we would build in yearly reviews of our strategy as part of the process. Additionally, the recommended staff development (in the PRG report) could support our work towards the achievement of agreed goals for CTL.

Quality improvement plan

The following areas have been discussed and proposed for development:

- Sustaining and developing the provision of the Academic Advisory Office.
- Maintaining and expanding the Writing Centre in tandem with developing an evidence based, institutionally appropriate approach to discipline specific writing programmes and initiatives.
- Reviewing and devising new Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities for teaching staff, particularly in terms of accredited programmes offering flexibility in module choice and mode of study.
- Devising a new technology-enhanced learning (TEL) strategy for the university in line with the intended plans for development inaugurated by Maynooth University.
- Enhancing staff capability and proficiency in using online and blended learning methodologies to support the embedding of technology within curricula to further enrich the student learning experience.
- Continuing to research and engage with scholarship in our areas of expertise.

Career Development Centre

The PRG's commendation of the vision outlined in the SAR and the key elements of the Employability Strategy is welcome.

The PRG Report is incorrect when it says the Career Development Centre "has little interaction with employers in the region." There are regular visits from employers to campus and they have information stands in the Arts Building, the Callan Building and occasional classroom talks. What is lacking as pointed out in the SAR is a properly resourced, focused and targeted Employer Engagement Strategy. Such a strategy would not only serve as a valuable marketing tool for Maynooth graduates, but would also be a key element of a Maynooth Graduate Employability agenda.

The PRG Report is correct when it identifies the potential for synergies with the Placement Office. There is already an excellent working relationship between CDC and Placement with cross-over and co-operation at every opportunity, e.g. campus visits by employers. However the Placement Office is like Careers, under-resourced, overworked and struggling to meet its existing levels of service.

In conclusion, the PRG's endorsement of the Career Development Centre's SAR is very welcome. It creates the potential for a cross- functional and inter-departmental engagement in meaningful

discussion on the future roles, visions and missions of the respective offices. Such a discussion should I think focus on;

Methodologies: what we do, how we do it and why we do it this way.

Obstacles: what are the obstacles to achieving our goals?

Metrics: how do we measure and evaluate what we do.

Placement Office

The Placement Office welcomes and accepts the Peer Review Group (PRG) recommendations in general. The PRG acknowledged that the work of the Placement Office has grown in recent years without a concomitant increase in resources while the reputation and success of the office remains in good stead and is due to the commitment of its staff. The commendation on the commitment to the students by the Placement Office and the relationships with external stakeholders is noted and welcomed.

The Placement Office Response to the PRG Recommendations:

The Placement Office will research what IT systems are available for placement work purposes including any systems already on campus.

Work on updating and creating university policies is under way and will be presented for approval. Once approved the policies may be included in the proposed handbook.

In order to implement a greater degree of involvement by Departments it will be necessary to engage with all departments at a high level. It is proposed that a series of placement information sessions be held for departments in order to increase awareness and knowledge of placement and its benefits to the students and the university.

The forum with the Career Development Centre and the Alumni Office can be established by organising regular meetings to share information. An excellent working relationship has already been established with the Career Development Centre since the Placement Office was established. An ad hoc working relationship with the Alumni Office was in place and a more formal relationship was established in early July 2015. It is hoped to build on these relationships in the forming of the new Placement/Career/Alumni Forum.