

# **Maynooth University Student Services**

## **Quality Improvement Plan**

**February 2017**

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## Introduction

All Student Services staff commenced this Quality Review cycle in 2015. A Self Assessment Report was written, the Peer Review Panel visited the campus on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015, and their Report was received on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

This Quality Improvement Plan sets out the University response to the recommendations and comments in the Peer Review Report, focusing on the steps which are proposed to be taken to address each element. In some instances the steps are clear actions to implement the recommendations; in other instances the steps set out a process to be undertaken to consider if and how the recommendation might be implemented, whether in full, in part or at all. In such instances, the final output or destination is not known and our actions are aimed at determining possible pathways and solutions.

For ease of reference to the Peer Review Report, each response is preceded by the Peer Review Report text, the text of the Recommendation and any additional comments made by the Peer Review Group. The grouping and order of the responses follows that of the Peer Review Report.

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## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Text	
Recommendation [S.1]	Additional PRG Comments
<i>It is strongly recommended that the University Executive appoint a Dean of Students – one who sits on the University Executive – who will be a strategic leader of the Student Experience and head up a newly formed unit to be known as “Student Life”. Under this model, the student front facing departments - Academic Advisory, Careers and Access would be brought from Registry to join those currently sitting in Student Services to form the Student Life unit led by the new Dean.</i>	
<i>Appoint a Dean of students – part of the University Executive – who will be a strategic leader of the student experience and the cohesiveness of the student lifecycle as a whole.</i>	<i>Under this model, the student front facing departments - Academic Advisory, Careers and Access would be part of a new unit known as “Student Life” led by the new Dean.</i>
<b>Response:</b>  The University understands the rationale for the appointment of a Dean of Students. This will be considered in conjunction with an overall review of the composition of the University Executive.	

Report Text	
Recommendation [S.2]	Additional PRG Comments
<i>In terms of internal governance, 10 direct reports to the Director creates an unwieldy structure which requires reforming. 4 clusters are identifiable, the 3 currently plus the 1 from those services currently in the Registry and leaders identified in each cluster would see a more streamlined structure. Student Services currently covers the work in an area of not insignificant risk to the university – especially in an increasingly litigious context. Given the proposal to increase the student population it is important to get an internal structure which can be resilient and minimise the risk by underpinning professionalism.</i>	
<i>3 clusters of sub-units, as outlined in the self assessment report, be created with the appointment of a leader for each cluster.</i>	<i>Natural leaders may emerge in each group, given the professional development opportunity. Otherwise a leader of each group may be appointable on a rotation basis? Could some financial remuneration be offered as an incentive for the staff to move up into this more responsible position?</i>
<b>Response:</b>	

The University accepts that the current structure requires reform. The principles of a reformed structure have been agreed by the University (September 2016) and the Director will work on implementation proposals for the University Executive, with all elements implemented by end 2018.

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [S.3]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>Monitoring and enhancing the Student Experience will require the introduction of a unified record for each individual student and therefore it is recommended that any future IT software development addressing the student should include consideration of extending its use through the Student Services' unit staff systems and Student Life under the newly organised structure.</i>	
<i>Introduction of University-wide IT systems focussing on student monitoring that should consider the expansion to standardise systems for Student Services and the new Student Life section</i>	
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>The University will look at how a common system (with access determined by agreed “need to know” protocols which protect confidentiality) might address the current deficit in the existence of systems which support key activities and collaborative working.</p> <p>The output from Recommendation U.1 will inform the requirements from the system. The output from Recommendation U.5 will guide the processes for inputs and access to the system.</p>	

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [S.4]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>It is recommended that the united unit budget be allocated to the Director, with assumed authority to sub-divide, re-allocate and distribute lying with her, thus allowing her to respond to student need and the organic nature of managing the student experience, often an unpredictable area.</i>	
<i>Student Services allocation of funding should be unit-wide and allocated to the Director for further in-unit allocation by her.</i>	
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>The University accepts this recommendation.</p>	

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [S.5]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>Funding guidance for student societies and clubs should be informed by the special experience from both Students' Union and Student Services. It is recommended that the senior Capitation Committee be reinstated as soon as possible with representation from Student Life, Students' Union, the Bursar's Office and academics.</i>	
<i>Reinstate the Capitation Committee.</i>	<i>with representation from Students' Union, Student Services and academics.</i>
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>The University view is that it is important to have clear consultative and decision-making structures to oversee the overall relationship with MSU, including the allocation and funding.</p>	

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [S.6]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
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<i>Secure the Budgeting Advisory Services.</i>	<i>Current contract due to end shortly.</i>
<b>Response:</b>	
The existing arrangement has been extended for a further year. A review to determine the role of this Service for 2017/2018 and beyond is in progress.	

## WHOLE OF UNIT RECOMMENDATIONS

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [U.1]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>It is encouraged that the unit staff address, as a matter of urgency, what they can do now to collect data to evidence their activity and interaction with students. In some cases systems are in place but under-used, in others systems need to be introduced. Urgent attention to this issue now will allow the staff to pilot the information which is most useful for them, helping to direct the design and application of wider systems to be developed in future.</i>	
<i>Staff should address data collection for purposes of evidencing current practice.</i>	<i>Current systems are in place in some areas but need analysis. Some areas need to introduce new systems but these need not be elaborate. Student interns might be used for high level, non confidential analysis?</i>
<b>Response:</b>	
Each Service undertakes to identify data which can be collected and recorded immediately and what can be collected in the future. A review of this work will determine the format of a Student Services Annual Report (the first one to be produced for the 2016-2017 academic year).	

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [U.2]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>A Benchmarking Exercise is recommended. With a view to encouraging the staff to think beyond their own immediate work focus, it is recommended that a broad selection of Student Services' staff are facilitated to explore different practices in their field throughout the HE sector. A benchmarking report should be produced by the end of second semester, June 2016, informing future practice.</i>	
<i>Benchmarking exercise</i>	
<b>Response:</b>	
A benchmarking exercise will be undertaken. Work is already in train	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to define the questions/issues/research to be addressed during the exercise; and</li> <li>• to identify the Universities which demonstrate best practice in the respective area, and where a visit may assist in addressing the identified issues.</li> </ul>	

<i>Report Text</i>	
<b>Recommendation [U.3]</b>	<i>Additional PRG Comments</i>
<i>The panel would support the staff's expressed desire for a comprehensive staff development programme, particularly assisting in the development of cross functional collaboration.</i>	
<i>Staff Development Programme across all staff in the unit.</i>	<i>Focus on collaborative working.</i>
<b>Response:</b>	
All Student Services staff are encouraged to undertake training and to attend conferences as appropriate (though it is recognised that such opportunities are typically within each individual's specific Service area). Student Services would welcome the re-introduction of the University-wide Staff development and training programme.	

Report Text	
Recommendation [U.4]	Additional PRG Comments
<i>It is recommended that new attention to communication between divisions within the service and with the Students' Union should protect that very special relationship. The communication needs to be frequent, and developed to cover both formal and informal professional liaison.</i>	
<i>Student Services staff and Student Union staff should develop a closer working partnership.</i>	<i>The initiative for this should come from the Student Services Director but communication should be embedded throughout all levels thereafter.</i>
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>Student Services currently works co-operatively with MSU across a range of initiatives, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare Forum (Health, Counselling, Pastoral Care);</li> <li>• Capitation Committee (Sports, Student Services);</li> <li>• Financial Support (SS, SBAS, Access);</li> <li>• Workshops with all Sabbatical Officers each semester (Counselling)</li> <li>• All Student Services sessions (start and end of each term of office)</li> </ul> <p>New Initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director has re-established a monthly meeting schedule with MSU officers;</li> <li>• Accommodation Forum (participants to include AO, MSU, IO, Access, Security);</li> </ul>	

Report Text	
Recommendation [U.5]	Additional PRG Comments
<i>An exercise is needed where professional staff in Student Services can join together in an open and honest exploration of their current balance between confidentiality and disclosure. Considerations need to, of course, pay attention to professional compliance and legislative limitations, but should also consider legislative demands of "who needs to know" and how staff can protect both the student and other members of their community, be they other students and/or colleagues. Institutional risk needs to be identified within current practice some of which may see confidentiality as an absolute concept.</i>	
<i>Professional staff exercise to examine the current balance between confidentiality and disclosure.</i>	<i>Although involving all professional practitioners, this might benefit from the inclusion of an external facilitator who has experience and knowledge of the complex issues involved in professional communication balance.</i>
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>An exercise along the lines recommended will be undertaken. The planned actions involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the Issue;</li> <li>• Facilitated Discussions;</li> <li>• Documenting;</li> <li>• Implementation.</li> </ul>	

## SUB-UNIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Text	
Recommendation [1. Sports Centre]	Additional PRG Comments
<i>The Sports' Centre carries good potential, but the equipment is poor and the facilities urgently require upgrading. In addition it would be beneficial to have a review of the need for a swimming pool or the identification of local appropriate swimming facilities which are not currently available. It is important that the expert operational views of staff are consulted before work is undertaken on their behalf to ensure appropriate measures are undertaken. It</i>	

was reported by numerous people that admissions are being, and will continue to be, negatively influenced by poor Sports facilities.

**Sports Centre:**  
Urgent review of facilities and equipment.

Taking evidence from current operational staff expertise.

**Response:**

A document setting out the strategic direction for sport and its place in the University into the future has been produced.

*Report Text*

**Recommendation [2. Counselling, Budgeting Adviser, The Hub]**

*Additional PRG Comments*

Environments which would benefit from review include the Student Hub, which, although staffed by friendly staff, gave a structural presentation which was not welcoming or obvious, students did not identify it as a desk they could approach as a point of first contact. The Counselling service and that of the Budgeting Advisor are both placed in a physical location which students considered to be such that accessing them is difficult and noted that hiding them away suggested that students should be somewhat ashamed to be seen to use them. It is important that the current facilities are explored from the perspective of a new student walking in – the Students' Union representatives and students who avail of the services might assist with ideas of how to make the current facilities more welcoming for students. There are several 'quick and easy wins' that could be made by making the decor more colourful, inviting and student friendly.

**Counselling, Budgeting Adviser, The Hub staff:**  
Work with student representatives and within current space limitations to try to maximise student friendly potential.

**Response:**

This recommendation is welcomed, though it is noted that recent feedback from new students accessing the Counselling Service does not concur that the Service is "difficult to access or hidden away". Work was done during Summer 2016 to make the Reception area in the Student Services Centre more welcoming and student-friendly. Further improvements are being considered.

*Report Text*

**Recommendation [3. Crèche]**

*Additional PRG Comments*

Whilst the Crèche is a warm and inviting space, it is not being used to its capacity. Some effort has been made to attract locals, however the hours of opening (from 8.45am) make it an unrealistic option for most working parents, who are likely to need to travel to work at an earlier hour. In addition, the lack of baby care facilities sees families understandably starting their children elsewhere and then continuing there.

**Crèche:**  
Review current usage.

key points of emphasis should include earlier starting times, baby room and summer staff retainers/redeployment.

**Response:**

Opening the Crèche to external users (if capacity remains when demand from students and staff is met) will be reviewed.

For the sake of clarity it is necessary to state that the Crèche's day-long childcare service is only available to the campus community, and the opening hours reflect this client schedule. The ECCE programme, which external users can avail of, is a State funded Scheme, providing a 3-hr Preschool programme to eligible children. As this service for external users cannot be coupled with the standard childcare offering, the issue of opening hours for commuters does not arise. This may not have been fully understood by the Peer Review Group.

*Report Text*

**Recommendation [4. Accommodation]**

*Additional PRG Comments*

*The on-campus Accommodation Service is popular with students, but there is not sufficient availability and the open nature of the campus 24/7 is of some concern. The case for restoring the common space back in the river apartments office building that is currently being used as the APT lecture theatre was well made and should be acted on to allow for res-life activities and a social space for residents, some of whom will remain on campus during holidays when other University social spaces will be closed.*

**Accommodation:**

*Revert use of APT building to common room space and consider blocking public access to accommodation at night.*

**Response:**

The Accommodation Office welcomes this recommendation and discussions are already in process to arrange the return of this facility, which will support the development of a “Res Life” programme.