

Quality Review

I.T. Services Unit
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
(a college of Dublin City University)

Peer Review Group Report - May 2007



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1 Introduction

This Peer Review Group (PRG) Report forms part of the Quality Review Process of the I.T. Services Unit at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra conducted in accordance with "A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities" (CHIU 2003) and complying with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997).

This is the first such Quality Review to be undertaken by the IT Services unit.

The Peer Review Visit took place on 19th and 20th April 2007 in conjunction with a quality review of the Audiovisual Department.

The PRG Report comprises of:

- a review of the I.T. Services Unit Self Assessment Report
- a review of the site visits
- a review of meetings with management / staff / students
- findings
- recommendations for improvement

Other details including profile of the I.T. Services Unit, details of the self-assessment and PRG processes, SWOT analysis and profiles of the PRG members, are set out in the appendices.

As documented in the Framework Document, Ireland has adopted an "improvement-oriented" quality model which requires the full support of those being reviewed to operate successfully. We wish to record our appreciation of the excellent support and assistance we received from the management and staff of the IT Services Unit and from Dr Dáire Keogh and Ms Sharon King of the Quality Promotion Unit.

2 Review of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG noted the well-structured, clear and concise nature of the report and the collaborative manner in which it was compiled. The questionnaires returned by users were comprehensive and the survey sample sufficiently significant to make the findings worthwhile and informative in enabling the PRG to confirm aspects of the unit's performance. The definition of services and users was helpful in enabling the group to reach an understanding of the work of the IT department. The very broad range of service being supported by the IT department was noted. However, the omission of "Strategic Objectives" was felt to be a weakness.

Identification of measures of performance was restricted to a discussion of the questionnaire results from the self assessment process itself. Given the limited resources available to the unit and the lack of specialisation within the support staff, it is not surprising perhaps that this area has historically been overlooked. Unfortunately the lack of such concrete data will tend to make it more difficult to build a business case for additional resources in the future.

The analysis of questionnaire findings could have been more probing, particularly in relation to the lack of PCs, and an age analysis of the IT asset base would have been very helpful. A brief section outlining the systems architecture, with the support of diagrams, would have been useful. The report does not present a breakdown of how individual members of staff within the department spend their time, the duties they fulfil and how much of their time they spend engaged in various tasks.

The responses to the survey showed the IT department to be customer-focused, helpful and flexible in approach. The report shows a very realistic sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the department. It also indicates an awareness of some of the opportunities and threats that the department faces in the immediate to medium term.

Given the size of the College and the limited staff complement (five) of the IT Services Unit, the report documents an impressive range of support services and a high level of satisfaction with those services among customers.

3 Site Visits

3.1 General

The PRG visited the IT Services unit, the server room, a range of Computer Labs, (including one housed in a temporary building), the library, the resource centre, the corridor-based PCs and a number of teaching rooms with IT/AV support. In visiting these facilities and in travelling between them, the sense of overcrowding and associated problems of heat and noise was generally apparent. However, staff and students seemed to deal positively with the difficult environment, successfully maintaining a good “academic atmosphere”.

3.2 Teaching Rooms / Lecture Theatres

A key feature of these rooms is extensive use of mobile AV facilities. The unmanaged cabling associated with this was a cause for concern.

3.3 Computer Labs

The facilities and rooms themselves appeared clean and well maintained. It was noted that periodic cleaning of PCs themselves was explicitly included within the cleaning contracts. The age of the equipment and the temperature in some of the rooms was a cause for concern.

3.4 IT Services Staff Offices / Support Room (E317)

The PRG noted the acute lack of space available to IT Services staff, both in terms of the layout of their workstations and their wholly inadequate storage space. Ventilation is very poor. The impracticality of a workspace in which staff are required to conduct repair/maintenance work at a bench that is immediately adjacent to the IT User Support helpdesk was also noted. There was no space available to support desk staff to facilitate quiet work with a degree of protection from interruption.

3.5 Server Room (E311)

This key room lacks basic server room facilities, such as equipment racking, cable management, effective air conditioning, room level uninterruptible power supply (UPS) and environmental monitoring and alert systems. Its running temperature is excessive and certainly constituted a threat to the correct operation of IT equipment and an unacceptable staff work environment. However, physical access appears to be properly controlled and UPS facilities are provided at server level. This difficult space is clearly being used resourcefully to deliver effective services, but its ad hoc and apparently undocumented layout would likely prove very demanding should any third party ever need to trouble-shoot or manage College systems located there.

4 Meetings with staff, students and management

4.1 General

A common feature of all the meetings was recognition of the excellent service ethic of the unit as a whole and its general effectiveness in meeting user service requirements. There was recognition of the difficult IT Services working conditions but perhaps some unrealistic expectations of what additional service could be provided by these staff from within the current IT staff resource. Some of the issues raised clearly extended beyond IT Services into the realm of the other support units and ICT related academic programmes such as Digital Learning.

4.2 Academic, Administrative & Library Staff

The PRG met with five members of academic, administrative and library staff, one of whom is a member of the ICT Committee. The issues addressed in these discussions were as follows:-

4.2.1 IT support staff: service

All staff expressed satisfaction with the speed and effectiveness with which IT support staff respond to their queries and requests for assistance. A strong view was expressed that the IT Services staff should support the Apple platform as well as Microsoft. A more explicit communication of services offered (and presumably not offered) would be appreciated. The issue of evening teaching of post-graduate courses and the absence of support in this period was noted.

4.2.2 Internet Connection (DCU)

Grave dissatisfaction was expressed by all staff representatives in relation to the unreliability of the DCU internet connection. One academic cited the fact that her organisation of a recent conference in the college was seriously impeded by the frequent outages in the network. The particularly problematic impact of such outages on the functioning of the TALIS system in the library was emphasised.

4.2.3 IT equipment

While the laptop loan facility was greatly appreciated, the age of workstations in general and the lack of wireless functionality on some laptops (typically a function of their age) was seen as an impediment to effective use.

4.2.4 Website

Concerns were expressed about the academic function of the college website. A greater role for IT Services was suggested. The PRG group noted a lack of clarity among staff as to where responsibility for the content and quality of the Institutional website resided.

4.2.5 Vision

There was a strong desire expressed to embrace e-learning on an extended scale via student laptops. However, the lack of a universal student laptop scheme and concerns about the ability of the current technical and support infrastructure were seen as obstacles to achieving this. Because of the focus on a new building, there has been insufficient short-term and medium-term planning for the current locations. This has also inhibited development.

4.3 Students

Students acknowledged that when they experience problems with either the college computers or their own laptops, the IT staff are very helpful. They identified a number of limitations in the existing IT service in the college.

4.3.1 Availability of computers to students

“Not enough computers” was the overriding message from the student group. The combination of an academic programme with very high student contact hours and a teaching staff activity embracing e-learning (and therefore the use of computer labs) in their core teaching, severely limits the IT resource available for independent study. In this the College is a victim of its own ICT success. The fact that the computer rooms are closed in the evenings and at weekends was identified as problematic.

4.3.2 Student laptops

A strong desire to use personal laptops (to compensate for the limited PC access) was expressed. Limiting factors identified were the lack of available work seating (ideally with power outlets available) in a wireless enabled area and the current inability to access the College print facilities from personal hardware.

4.3.3 Internet Connection (DCU)

Students expressed their frustration at the uncertainty surrounding the Internet connection (DCU link).

4.3.4 Slow PC logons

Several students complained that PC logon times in certain labs (presumably those with older PCs) was very slow.

4.3.5 Email and Moodle

Reservations were expressed as to the usefulness of the College email compared to personal email accounts – issues around separate passwords seemed to weigh heavily here. There was no awareness of a College policy on the use of email or any requirements for Students to check their accounts regularly. Instead this was seen as depending only on the personal preference of teaching staff. The attitude to Moodle was generally much more positive. However, the requirement for separate authentication for both Moodle and College email was seen as a major disadvantage which limits their usefulness.

4.3.6 IT communication & training

The students suggested that there is scope for additional information to be provided (perhaps via the student diary) on the services provided by the IT unit. There was also a perceived need for additional IT skills induction for first year students.

4.3.7 Vision

As well as a general need for more study space with IT access available, there was an awareness of issues relating to potential conflict between, on one hand, quiet individual use and on the other more social use of the facilities. The increasing popularity of social networking software was seen as contributing greatly to this. One suggestion was that "social space" for IT could be provided.

4.4 Senior Management

The PRG met with the college president, secretary bursar and registrar as a group and discussed the following issues:

- e-learning
- I.T. Services Unit (incl. internal structure, staffing etc.)
- Management Information Systems (MIS)
- Internet Connectivity (DCU)

4.4.1 e-learning

Senior management reiterated their commitments to e-learning as outlined in the college's strategic plan. They highlighted the EOLAS project, the use of Moodle, the availability of Wifi and the increased use of e-journals as evidence of same. They confirmed that named individuals have been given responsibility for implementing the 'e-learning actions' detailed in the college's strategic plan. They are conscious that the organisation structures through which the above are delivered have evolved over time and that some change may be necessary.

4.4.2 I.T. Services Unit (incl. internal structure, staffing etc.)

Senior Management commended the work of the I.T. Services unit noting the constraints under which the staff operate. Recent developments (particularly student e-mail) were highlighted as evidence of their good work. They hoped that the unit would continue to deliver current services to staff and students while anticipating new college requirements and technical developments. In particular the Secretary Bursar looked forward to the development of online registration and fee-payment but accepted that this was contingent on identifying and adopting a new system for all college data.

They acknowledged staffing issues such as:

- over-reliance on individual members of staff

- flatness of the current career structure (and need for a new structure)
- sustainability of current arrangements in the medium term
- staff retention

but explained that college management has limits to its discretion on such matters. External approval must be sought for changes.

4.4.3 Management Information Systems (MIS)

The Secretary Bursar stated that the college needs an integrated information system but highlighted the need to bear in mind that, as a small-to-medium sized institution, the college is constrained by its limited budget. He stressed that the college is in an early stage in a process of transition from a small to a medium sized institution and that this has a bearing on management's planning.

The President indicated that he is very conscious that the college is highly dependent upon one individual or company in relation to management of student records and indicated that at management level there is an awareness of the need to investigate alternatives to the current arrangement.

The Registrar pointed to progress that had recently made with respect to the college's IT services, specifically citing improvements in the college's student email system.

4.4.4 Internet Connectivity (DCU)

The President acknowledged that the performance of the internet connection (via DCU) is now unacceptable for the college and stated that he is currently awaiting a report on the problem.

The Secretary Bursar explained that there is a structural issue which complicates funding for connectivity for Colleges of Education (in contrast to universities).

5 Findings

5.1 Organisation and Management of the Department

The staff and student surveys, the site visit and the interviews with user groups all show clearly that the current unit organisation is very effective in delivering good quality user support services. However, the current “two tier” organisation with the IT Services manager focusing on College services and the rest of the staff on user support has a number of limitations. Firstly the delivery of critical services effectively becomes the remit of one individual. In the absence of this individual these critical services are at risk. Secondly the focus of the other team members on ‘user support’ limits their ability to contribute to the development of the institutional IT infrastructure and to develop higher level IT skills. Thirdly the lack of specialisms within the user support team limits staff development and the delivery of specialist user support services. Finally, if the IT Manager should be required to adopt a more strategic role within the College, he ought to be able to delegate the day-to-day running of server room systems to another staff member.

5.2 Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

All the evidence seen by the PRG suggested that the current demand for IT support fully absorbs all the staff time available. The interviews with staff and students show that there are unmet demands for additional services, such as Apple Macintosh support. There is no obvious scope for releasing staff time by discontinuing some current services. Indeed, the likely need to divert staff time towards infrastructural services will further increase the pressure on user support services. The future choice therefore should lie between explicit prioritisation and rationing of user support services on one hand or increasing IT Services technical staffing on the other.

Staff and server room accommodation is inadequate. While the PRG observed that work space is an issue throughout the Institution, it was felt that the situation in IT Services was particularly poor and required action in the short term.

A number of the issues identified in this review have clear resource implications (PC lab renewal, laptop renewal, staffing requirements, student use of laptops in teaching space etc.). The relative merits of such proposals can only be sensibly evaluated within the contexts of e-learning and Information Systems and Technology plans.

6 Recommendations for Improvement

6.1 College Recommendations

6.1.1 Introduction

Information systems and technology (IS&T) form an essential core to the function of any modern organisation. They underpin human communications through email, internet access, website publishing and telephony. Security and building environmental control systems require them to be available and reliable 365 days a year. Increasingly they contain “the recorded collective knowledge” of the organisation. They allow that “knowledge” to be accessed, structured, analysed, re-purposed and archived. In the event of physical disasters (say major damage to or destruction of a building) they have the potential to support the rapid relocation of staff and the continuance of the business function.

6.1.2 I.T. Governance

The PRG strongly recommends that the following responsibilities be given to an oversight committee (perhaps the existing ICT Committee):

- Exercise general oversight in the use of all Information Systems and Technology (IS&T) at St. Patrick's College, including (but not limited to) those technologies managed by the I.T. Services Unit.
- Where elements of IS&T are managed by departments / units other than the I.T. Services Unit, ensure that (i) there is overall co-ordination in the deployment of technology / services with a view to providing the best service to the end user (ii) any resulting duplication of technology, services or human resources across the organisation as a whole is minimised and (iii) there is clear communication with end users as to where responsibilities lie for each element of the technology or service.
- Oversee compliance with I.S&T elements of relevant legislation / regulations / reports including (but not limited to):
 - Data Protection Act
 - Freedom of Information Act
 - Official Languages Act
 - Health & Safety Legislation
 - “Green” I.T. issues
 - Issues raised by institutional auditors
 - Issues arising out of the “Risk Register” exercise
- Oversee compliance with I.S&T elements of national, sectoral and institutional plans / policies including (but not limited to):
 - Institutional Strategic Plans
 - I.T. Services Unit Information Systems and Technology Plans (see “Planning” below)
 - Perhaps – I.T. Plans of DCU (if appropriate)

The committee should have increased administration representation (minutes of 23-Nov-2006 noted).

The Registrar and Bursar should be ex-officio members of the committee.

6.1.3 Management Information Systems (MIS)

The PRG strongly recommends that responsibilities for Information Systems (e.g. Student Administration, Finance, Payroll, Library) are clearly defined and communicated within the organisation. Even where such systems are serviced by external contractors, there must be oversight (including technical oversight) of their work. N.B. While placing responsibility for MIS under the control of the I.T. Services unit has advantages, it is not necessary that this responsibility be placed there (or indeed with any one unit). However, there needs to be clarity as to where, within St. Patrick's College, responsibility lies for each system and this needs to be communicated within the organisation.

The PRG recognises that there are a number of viable alternatives (including closer alignment with DCU) for the development of MIS at St. Patrick's College. We suggest that the college takes external advice on this issue and then chooses which (among the alternative strategies) is most appropriate.

6.1.4 College Website

The PRG strongly recommends that the college website be reviewed and upgraded to portray an improved image of the college, to comply with various "accessibility" regulations and to provide easier access to information for prospective students. This is as much about keeping the website vibrant and the content current as it is about technology or web-editing issues. The greater challenge here will be about "ownership of the web content" rather than the mechanics of updating it.

6.1.5 Information Systems and Technology Planning

The PRG recommends that the I.T. Services Unit and other unit / department involved in the provision of I.T. Services be asked periodically to produce plans for consideration and approval by the oversight committee.

That the I.T. Services Unit and any other unit / department involved in the provision of I.T. Services be asked periodically to report on progress made against such plans.

Acknowledging the small size of the I.T. Services Unit and with a view to any planning exercise being proportionate to that size, it is recognised that such plans might (at least initially) be no more than a list of projects and planned delivery dates.

Over time these plans should be extended to cover areas such as network development, institutional connectivity, protection of essential core services, end user hardware lifecycle management, data backup and recovery, development of management information systems, information security, risk management and business continuity planning.

Specifically the following should be addressed (from the institutional strategic plan 2006-2010)

- "the College is and will continue to be actively engaged in the promotion of innovative use of digital technologies in Education"
- E-learning:
 - "develop college infrastructure to support innovation in this area"

- “all college programmes to incorporate active use of IT”
- “incorporate a blended approach into all in-service programmes”
- “offer a number of new ‘continuing professional development programmes’ using on-line learning as predominant mode”
- Develop integration of library-based information and skills training as part of College curriculum.
- Campus Development: “develop library and IT facilities”

6.1.6 Update e-learning Strategy

Solid Information Systems and Technology Planning will facilitate pedagogical exploitation of ICT. The ready availability of reliable systems, communications and data services will facilitate and encourage good practise and innovation. The e-learning strategy should build on this core, encouraging and co-ordinating innovation and evaluation and feeding back technological support requirements and priorities to management.

The roles of units and individuals with responsibilities related to e-learning should be reviewed with aim to simplification, clarity and more effective inter-communication.

The particular issue of support for the use of technology within teaching spaces should be looked at with the aim to provide a “single point of contact” for staff requesting help and booking facilities. After the review a “catalogue” of all services and how those services are accessed should be made easily and clearly available to all staff and students.

Plans for both the enhancement of existing teaching spaces and the development of new teaching spaces (presumably in the context of a new building) need to be considered carefully. A key element of this should be the provision of wireless connectivity in such spaces with access from student-owned laptops to a full range of I.T. services – ideally including printing.

6.1.7 Unit Staffing Levels

Given the small staff complement of the unit, the above activities will inevitably raise the issue of staffing levels. This should be reviewed by the college. If the review finds that extra staff are needed to meet key strategic goals then these posts should be provided. If for any reason this does not happen then services must be prioritised (and if necessary user support rationed) to ensure that key strategic goals are met.

6.2 IT Services Unit Recommendations

6.2.1 Restructuring of Staff Responsibilities

A number of issues arising from the current two tier staff structure have already been listed in a previous section. The PRG recommends that new staff structures should be considered to address these issues. The question of whether this can be done satisfactorily with the existing staffing level and post grading must also be fully explored. The following issues should be borne in mind in this process. Firstly the capability to support and resolve problems with critical

systems should be spread among a number of people. Secondly all team members should have appropriate professional development opportunities, including access to external training and “networking” opportunities. Thirdly team specialisms should be developed, possibly linked to an organisational restructuring. For example, one scenario would be the creation of “User Support Officer” (in charge of helpdesk, software licensing and user training) and “Systems Officer” (network administrator, server room operation and PC deployment) posts. The IT Manager post itself should be expected to take on a greater strategic and planning role, advising senior management on all aspects of Information Systems policy.

6.2.2 Physical Accommodation

The clear shortcomings of the server room should be addressed in the short term. This issue is central to Information Systems security and institutional risk management. Staff accommodation should also be reviewed for possible short term improvements. The relocation of storage space may present some scope to achieve these.

6.2.3 Hardware Assets Management

The “hardware assets” database should be developed to enable a clear age profile of equipment to be reported on. This information should be used to initiate a rolling replacement programme linked to planned spending over approx. 5 years.

6.2.4 Job Tracking

Consideration should be given to developing the helpdesk job logging system (or acquire a new system) in order to monitor the level and nature of support requests and report on same. This data should inform resource allocation within the unit, applications for additional staffing, user training plans and hardware upgrade plans.

“PC remote control” software should be considered as a faster and possibly more effective means to assist staff in offices with PC problems and to deliver basic “one-to-one” user instruction.

6.2.5 Windows Server 2003

The forthcoming migration to Windows server 2003 will bring with it a large number of new facilities and possibilities both at system and user level. The implementation team should have access to the time and training resources to ensure that this major upgrade is fully exploited to benefit the College. One particular area which may bear fruit is the implementation of “single sign on” technology (ideally in conjunction with DCU) to integrate and simplify secure access to the College network, the email system and Moodle.

6.2.6 Apple Support

The requests from teaching staff for Apple technology support should be given serious consideration. If a solid educational case (as distinct from mere user preference) can be established, then the IT Staff resource implications should be fully considered and a recommendation made to management.

6.2.7 College Internet Connection

The disruption caused by this service failure should not be simply regarded as a short term (hopefully) inconvenience. Rather it should be taken as an illustration of the many risks to the functions of the College when a critical “single point of failure” exists without a service level agreement or business continuity plan. The unit should work with management to ensure all such risks are clearly identified and controlled.

6.2.8 Student Computer Labs

Given the feedback about:

- insufficient student PCs
- slow logon times

consideration should be given to providing additional student PCs and instituting a more vigorous “student PC lab replacement cycle”.

In particular the PRG recommends that student PCs be moved from corridors (not least from a health & safety viewpoint) to more appropriate locations.

6.2.9 Wireless facilities for Students

Improved facilities for students to access systems and services using their own technologies over wireless networks should be provided. A substantial element of this may be the provision of appropriate seating in wireless-enabled areas. In time appropriate facilities for students to print material from their wireless-enabled notebook computers should be provided.

7 Appendix-A : Profile of the I.T. Services Unit

7.1 Background

The IT Services unit came into existence in 1996 when IT support was split from Audio Visual Services which had previously included this function. The linkage agreement between St Patrick's College and Dublin City University (DCU) in 1993 also led to close cooperation in IT matters, with some services (such as the Institutional Internet connection and email services) being delivered by DCU. The unit operates under the office of the Bursar but regards its primary role as the support of the academic requirements of the College. The unit head is a member of the ICT committee which is a subcommittee of Academic Council. The ICT committee has oversight of all academic related IT application within the institution. IT Services also liaise directly with the Digital Learning Unit, an academic lead group which co-ordinates the embedding of ICT within College teaching.

7.2 Location

The IT Services Unit is located in the centre of the main teaching building. It occupies a part of a space originally designed to accommodate Audio Visual production and Micro Teaching and continues to share storage space with the current Audio Visual unit. Staff offices and teaching spaces serviced are spread throughout the St Patrick's site in multiple buildings, some up to 250m from the unit.

7.3 Staff

The unit consists of an IT Manager, two Technical Officers and two User Support posts. All staff in the unit report directly to the IT Manager.

7.4 Services

IT user support services are delivered to approximately 220 staff and 2,300 student users. In hardware terms approximately 475 PCs and 130 laptops are currently deployed and managed. In addition, assistance with wireless network connectivity is provided for a large number of student-owned laptops. The helpdesk is open from 8:30am to 6:30pm weekdays in term time with shorter hours at other times.

The server room provides network login authentication, user and group central storage, print queue management, the institutional web server, the finance/student information server, PC imaging services, backup, wireless network management and Internet connectivity via DCU.

8 Appendix-B : The Self-Assessment Process

An IT Services Quality Review Committee was established to oversee the preparation of the Self Assessments report for the unit. The members of the committee were as follows:-

- John Hammond Senior Technical Officer
- Yvonne Marshall Technical Officer
- Michael Shannon Technical Officer
- Noemi Richini User support
- Vincent O'Connor User support

John Hammond coordinated the review and acted as representative on the College QA committee. Quality review business was incorporated into the existing weekly team meetings. The resulting self assessment document was reviewed and agreed by all the IT unit staff.

9 Appendix-C : The PRG Process

The review process was composed of three stages.

- familiarisation with the IT Services Self Assessment Report
- a site visit over two days to review and validate this report
- a collaborative process of producing the Peer Review Group Report itself

The Peer Review Group had its initial meeting on the morning of 19th April at which Brian Carolan was appointed Chair and Marian Lyons was appointed Rapporteur. The draft schedule for the visit was finalised and the following additional documentation and information was requested:

- Details of the Digital Learning Unit's role
- The operational budget for the IT department
- Details of where responsibility for College information systems lies
- The brief of the college's Teaching and Learning Committee
- IT unit's reporting structure
- Delineation of responsibility for delivery of IT related functions
- Support for staff development
- Policy on student induction to IT
- Data protection policy
- St Patrick's College Strategic Plan 2006-2010
- Relevant sections of the college's risk register
- The terms of reference of the college's ICT Committee
- Selection of minutes of recent meetings of the college's ICT Committee

The group then proceeded to review the IT Services self assessment report for the rest of the morning. The afternoon consisted of visits, by the full peer review group, to a range of relevant locations around the campus. This was followed by meetings with representative groups of staff and students. The second day began with individual meetings with the IT Services manager and all unit staff. There then followed a meeting with the College President, the Bursar and the Registrar. The draft report was compiled in the afternoon and an exit oral presentation was given to all unit staff. It should be noted that this review of the IT Services unit was carried out in tandem with a review of the Audio Visual department. While there were some commonalities

and associated benefits in this, the group felt that the two day period allocated was insufficient for both tasks to be accommodated fully.

The writing of the final report was a collaborative activity undertaken jointly by the review team in the weeks following the review visit. Again the need to produce two review reports increased the time required.

10 Appendix-D : Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Concerns

10.1 Strengths

- User focused service ethic
- Good IT team staff morale and staff and student relationships
- Team working successfully delivered despite very difficult work environment
- Technically proficient and resourceful maintenance and development of infrastructure
- Track record of consistent service delivery over time
- An IT literate teaching staff, proactive in the application of e-learning technologies within their core student teaching.

10.2 Weaknesses

- Lack of clearly articulated strategic approach to IT infrastructure development
- Over reliance on the IT Manager for all “server room” functions
- Lack of specialisation and associated staff development opportunities within the technician team
- Work environment

10.3 Opportunities

- As the institution continues to address issues such as “Business Continuity Planning”, “Information Security” and “Risk Management”, IT infrastructure issues should be afforded attention and resources.
- Advance planning for the “new building” will require examination of all teaching and learning space issues. If all stakeholders engage fully and thoroughly, this process itself may provide the impetus to examine, improve and adapt the use of the existing spaces.
- The forthcoming migration from NT4 to Windows 2003 based infrastructure will bring opportunities to enhance existing services and perhaps deliver new ones. The area of user authentication and single sign on may prove fruitful.
- Increased collaboration among departments within the college (and possibly with DCU) to deliver improved e-learning and mobile learning.

10.4 Concerns

- Ever rising user demands may absorb all the available staff resource. As a result, staff development, infrastructural development and strategic planning could be abandoned in favour of “fire fighting” and service delivery.
- The IT Services unit may come to lack innovation and adaptation capacity (see previous point). The next acceleration of IT technological change could easily make existing services obsolete.
- New building “planning blight” may lead to inertia as action (and spending) is repeatedly deferred.

11 Appendix-E : PRG Members

Helen Guerin

Helen Guerin is the Director of the UCD Audio Visual Centre and is the National Nominee to the European Commission Information Society Technologies Programme - Technology Enhanced Learning. She has been a member of the UCD President's Awards and Grants Committee, the University Teaching Committee, the Board of Studies for the Graduate Diploma in University Teaching and Learning, Adult Education and Film Studies. She is on the Executive Committee of the All Ireland Society for Higher Education, and a member of Irish Management Institute, the Educational Association of Ireland and Screen Producers Ireland.

Dr Marian Lyons

Dr Marian Lyons is a lecturer in the Department of History, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. A specialist in early modern Irish and French history, she has published widely on Franco-Irish relations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and on the Kildare dynasty in Ireland. She is co-director of the Irish in Europe Project and joint editor of Irish Historical Studies. She is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (London).

Charles Reid

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12 Appendix-F : Appreciations

The Peer Review Group wish to express its gratitude to the Quality Promotion Staff of St Patrick's College, particularly Dr Dáire Keogh for his invitation to participate in the review process and to Ms Sharon King for her role in facilitating the organisation and smooth running of the exercise. We also wish to thank the staff of the IT Department for their willingness to participate in this process in a meaningful fashion and for the very considerable effort and time they invested in preparing the self-assessment report. Our thanks to the academic, administrative and library staff, to the students and to the President, the Secretary Bursar and the Registrar for their valuable contributions and for giving so generously of their time.