



**President's Office**

**St Patrick's College**

**Quality Improvement Plan**

**March 2007**

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Profile of the Unit**

The Office of the President is a small but key office in the College. It is currently staffed by the College President, a Higher Executive Officer, and by a half-time Executive Officer, who carries out the duties of Freedom of Information Officer and other general duties within the office.

The President's Office supports the President in the exercise of his duties. As such, it is concerned with the overall direction of the College in its academic, administrative, financial, human resource and other activities.

The Office provides administrative support to:

- The President of the College who is Chief Executive Officer
- Governing Body which has overall responsibility for the governance of the College
- Management Committee which assists and advises the President in relation to the exercise of his duties
- The Strategic Planning Committee which advises the College on strategic issues and prepares and monitors implementation of strategic plans.

The Office liaises directly with the key stakeholders including:

- Dublin City University
- Higher Education Authority
- Department of Education and Science
- Colleges of Education
- Other Universities in Ireland and abroad
- Archbishop's House.

The Office also has a key role in the following areas:

- Internal and External Communications, including dealing with the Press and media, and in publishing the news & events section of the Website
- Freedom of Information
- Appointments/HR in consultation with the HR Manager
- Management of College Research and Professional Development Fellowship Schemes.
- Administration of College Postgraduate scholarships
- Liaison with Alumni
- Co-ordination of PR in relation to Graduation
- Liaison in relation to student welfare, student residences, critical incidents in relation to students, etc.
- Maintenance of College Archives.
- Administration of Ethics in Public Office returns
- Administration of the Seamus Heaney lecture series.

## **2. The Quality Assurance Process**

The President's Office welcomed the quality assurance process. The process coincided with the finalisation of the College Strategic Development Plan 2006-2010, and as a result imposed considerable additional pressures. However, it was agreed that the potential benefits of the process merited proceeding.

The first stage of the quality assurance process was the preparation of a self-assessment report. This was completed between May 2005 and January 2006. It included designing detailed questionnaires, which were circulated to staff, students, graduates and external partners. The responses provided were used to assist in the self-assessment. As they were returned anonymously, respondents were free to speak openly. In general, the responses were positive. A SWOT analysis was also conducted, and its results incorporated into the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).

Arising from our own experience, we feel that the quality assurance process is also worthwhile for College units/departments, not so much for what might be gained by way of physical resources or new staff, but for the self-awareness gained. The benefits of the process for the Unit included group work, team building, and a more systematic and strategic approach.

## **3. The Peer-Review Process**

A peer review group (PRG) was nominated by the Quality Assurance Committee in accordance with the agreed criteria and following consultation with the Unit.

The members of the PRG were:

- Mr Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh
- Ms Sheyla Ryan, Senior Executive Officer, President's Office, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- Dr Mark Morgan, Head of Education Department, St. Patrick's College.

The SAR was submitted to the PRG in January 2006. The site visit took place on 27 and 28 February 2006. Mr Andy Pollak agreed to act as Chair and Ms Sheyla Ryan as Rapporteur.

Copies of relevant College policies, procedures, publications and staff job descriptions were tabled or available to the PRG as requested.

The PRG had full access to the Unit and all College staff. They visited the relevant offices and other College facilities.

- Following briefing by the Acting Co-ordinator of Quality Assurance, the PRG met the staff of the President's Office, collectively and individually.
- The group met the Chairperson of the Governing Body, the Bursar, the Registrar, members of the Management Committee and Heads of Department, members of the Students Union, and a range of administrative and support staff.

At the conclusion of the PRG visit, staff of the Unit were given a verbal summary of the main findings. The final written report was received in the College on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

#### **4. General Response to the Recommendations**

In its self assessment report, the Unit presented a draft development plan for the President's Office. This provided for:

- A phased extension of the work of the office to include *inter alia*, enhanced activity in relation to communications, PR, and external relations.
- Improved efficiency in existing functions, *inter alia* through re-organisation and role appraisal.
- Clarification, and in some cases, redirection of functions inside and outside the Unit. In particular, in relation to HR and student services.

To support this plan, some modest resourcing proposals were made. The report of the PRG endorses this development plan unequivocally.

The staff of the Unit found the QA process as a whole a very constructive one. The interaction with the PRG was positive and affirming. Their report confirmed the analysis of the Unit's own self-assessment and their recommendations very largely coincide with those of the SAR.

The Mission of the Unit as set out in its SAR is "To provide a quality service by being professional, friendly, responsive and dynamic". The PRG confirmed that the Unit lives up to this Mission:

"The PRG concludes that the President's Office does indeed meet its mission – it is professional, it provides a quality service, it is friendly, responsive and dynamic ....."

We warmly welcome this affirmation of our work. We also note and endorse the view that our service could be further enhanced by engaging with the specific recommendations of the PRG. We are wholeheartedly committed to doing so.

The overall finding of the PRG was that the President's Office is "a very harmonious, extremely well-functioning and efficient unit..... the office functions well as a cohesive team with obvious mutual respect and positive interpersonal relations. Its members are seen as helpful, accessible and very good at doing their jobs by College staff and students alike". The report mentions the very high personal regard in which the office and its staff are held. We are gratified by these findings.

It is noted, however, that the Unit is over-stretched, with some important areas of work being neglected due to time/staff shortages. We agree with this finding, which confirms the views expressed in our SAR. We also note the conclusion that while the staff demonstrate huge good-will, it may be in danger of being taken for granted by additional work demands continuing to be placed on them.

The PRG focussed their report under three headings: Accessibility, Efficiency and Friendliness. They explained that this was based on the fact that these words were applied to the Unit by all of the people the group met during their visit. The report identifies strengths and weaknesses under these three headings. Almost without exception, these strengths and weaknesses are those identified in the Swot Analysis conducted by the Unit as part of the Self-assessment process. They will be addressed in the recommendations section of this document (Section B).

## B. PRG RECOMMENDATIONS, UNIT RESPONSE AND IMPLEMENTATION

In this section, we list each recommendation, the Unit response to the recommendation and when it will be implemented.

### 1. Strategic

<p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>1.1 Put process in motion re clarity of job definitions/specifications/ clarity of roles (initially in the form of a good organisational chart). The President should be the final rather than the first recourse - he needs time and space to deal with the big strategic issues. There is maybe a function for the Governing Body to ensure continuity and sustainability.</p>	
<p><b>Our response</b></p>	<p>We welcome this recommendation or series of recommendations. It covers several unrelated areas:</p> <p><b>1.1 (a) Organisational Chart</b> – the roles referred to are the relative duties of President’s Office and other College Officers/offices. An updated organisational chart would certainly be helpful. The chart prepared by the office as part of the SAR provides a useful template which will be circulated widely for comment.</p> <p><b>1.1 (b) President’s Job Description</b> – we agree that the lack of a conventional job description for the President should appropriately be addressed by the Governing Body in advance of the next appointment to that position.</p> <p><b>1.1 (c) Continuity</b> – it is assumed that the Registrar and Bursar would have authority to act in the absence of the President. However, this needs to be clarified and explicit arrangements made in the event of the illness or long-term absence of the President.</p> <p><b>1.1 (d) Sustainability</b> – while the role of the President has become more complex and demanding in recent years, the senior management structure of the institution has remained unchanged with the President, Registrar and Bursar being the senior officers. In response to the increasing volume of work, the approach has been to supplement the staffing of the Registrar’s and Bursar’s Offices by the appointment of Assistant Registrar and Assistant Secretary Bursar respectively. The PRG raised the need for the appointment of a Vice-President as has been the case in most other third level institutions. It is doubtful whether the current arrangements are sustainable. In our view, this matter should be seriously considered by Governing Body.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility</b></p>	<p>(a) <b>Organisational Chart</b> – Management Committee          (b) <b>President’s Job Description</b> – Governing Body          (c) <b>Continuity</b> – Management Committee to bring proposal to Governing Body          (d) <b>Sustainability</b> – Governing Body</p>

<b>Implementation</b>	(a) Organisational Chart – 2007 (b) President’s Job Description – 2008 (c) Continuity – 2007 (d) Sustainability – 2008
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<b>Recommendation</b> 1.2 Need to examine work schedules which staff currently feel comfortable with in the light of overall college requirements, particularly as the college grows.	
<b>Our response</b>	We agree. Work schedules are a product of the volume of work, the staffing available, time management and prioritisation. The first two of these are addressed in other recommendations. The office will review the latter annually in the context of Performance Management, with a view to ensuring optimum efficiency.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal
<b>Implementation</b>	Immediately and annually

<b>Recommendation</b> 1.3 Need for structure to provide backup in the event of unscheduled absences.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agree strongly. This assumes adequate staff numbers within the office and/or available for short-term redeployment from elsewhere in the College at short notice. A specific plan in relation to this will be drawn up and relevant training provided.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal
<b>Implementation</b>	2007

<b>Recommendation</b> 1.4 Need for structure which will maintain the institutional memory into future presidencies.	
<b>Our response</b>	We agree. Our understanding of this recommendation is that it relates to a number of issues: the need for well documented procedures and systems; more highly developed senior management structure; and Succession Planning. Procedures and systems will continue to be reviewed and developed. The senior management structure will be enhanced by the appointment of Deans and other Principal Lecturers as part of the new career structure. The composition of Management Committee will be reviewed accordingly. Other proposals in this document also bear on the senior management structure. In relation to Succession Planning, there is a need for College to invest in Management training for staff at all levels. Succession Planning in relation to the President is a matter for Governing Body.

<b>Responsibility</b>	(a) Systems and procedures – President/Management Committee (b) Management structure – Management Committee (c) Management training – HR Manager (d) Succession Planning – Governing Body
<b>Implementation</b>	(a) Systems and procedures – ongoing (b) Management structure – 2007 (c) Management training – 2007 and ongoing (d) Succession Planning – 2008

<b>Recommendation</b> 1.5 Need to transfer some responsibilities	
<b>Our response</b>	Agree strongly. The case for the transfer of some responsibilities was elaborated in the SAR. The appointment a HR Manager has meant that responsibilities in relation to HR, which were temporarily assumed by the President’s Office, have now reverted to this area. The development of the Student Services area, along the lines indicated in the College Strategic Plan ( <u>Ar Aghaidh 2006-2010</u> ) will also result in a transfer of first line responsibility out of the President’s Office.  The suggested enhancement of staffing would allow the redistribution of responsibilities within the office.
<b>Responsibility</b>	(a) Transfer of Human Resources duties – already implemented (b) Development of Student Services area – College Management Committee
<b>Implementation</b>	(a) Transfer of Human Resources duties – already implemented (b) Development of Student Services area – As per College Strategic Plan – 2007, 2008

<b>Recommendation</b>	
1.6 Communications / PR & Marketing – an important role that may need a separate post	
<b>Our response</b>	<p>We agree that this is an area of developing need. We would note that there are two distinct areas involved. Currently the responsibility for PR and external Communications is held by the SA in the President's Office, assisted by an <i>ad hoc</i> committee. It is envisaged that the duties of the EO position which is currently vacant would include PR. However, we are also of the view that the College should engage the services of an external PR company on a part-time basis with a view to enhancing the external image of the College and of Teacher Education in a proactive manner.</p> <p>The area of internal College Communications is one of considerable importance. While this was not raised explicitly by the PRG, in our view it would be timely to review this area. We would propose that it should be addressed in the first instance by Management Committee.</p> <p>The area of Marketing is currently dealt with by the Admissions Office and it is not proposed to change that. It relates to the promotion of College courses. Given the importance of this area, and in the context of the developments mentioned above, it would be appropriate that the President's Office should have an involvement. However, it is not proposed to transfer the first-line responsibility.</p>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<p>(a) PR – Internal and in consultation with HR Manager regarding job description for EO. College Management regarding external PR company</p> <p>(b) Review of internal College Communications – Management Committee</p> <p>(c) Marketing – College Management/Registrar/ Admissions</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p>(a) PR – 2007</p> <p>(b) Communication – 2008</p> <p>(c) Marketing – ongoing</p>

<b>Recommendation</b>	
1.7 Student services (counselling, Chaplaincy & mature students) – a complex area which needs to be more systematically organised	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. Counselling/chaplaincy and mature students lie outside the President's Office but impinge significantly on it. It is proposed in the College strategic plan to integrate all student services through the establishment of a Student Services Committee and the appointment of a Student Services Officer.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Management Committee
<b>Implementation</b>	2007/8

<b>Recommendation</b>	
1.8 Consideration might be given in the context of a future review of senior management functions to the possibility of a new post to take responsibility for the above two areas.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. See above. The position contemplated here is at a more senior level and of a different nature than that referred to above. It is agreed that this might be considered in the context of a future review of senior management functions (including possible Vice-Presidency) and in the light of the experience of the other changes proposed in the Student Services area.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Management Committee/Governing Body
<b>Implementation</b>	2008

<b>Recommendation</b>	
1.9 HR function appears to be a key issue – attention to ensure that it functions effectively and combines credibility and independence of role with the authority of the President when necessary. There was wide agreement that the personality and credibility of this senior person would be vital.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. This matter has been already addressed through the appointment of a HR Manager at a higher grade (AP) than previous (HEO) incumbent. It will be necessary to continue to develop this area.
<b>Responsibility</b>	President/Secretary-Bursar
<b>Implementation</b>	Already Implemented/Ongoing

## 2. Operational

<b>Recommendation</b>	
2.1 The need for additional clerical/administrative staff to ensure issues are dealt with in a timely fashion – to use an expression from their SAR, “frustration at fire-fighting and having to respond to the urgent to the neglect of the important”.	
<b>Our response</b>	<p>Agreed. A specific staffing plan was outlined in the SAR as follows: Restore on a phased basis the administrative establishment of the President’s Office to previously sanctioned levels, with addition of half-time CO: this would result in the following staffing levels: HEO (1); EO (1.5); CO (1).</p> <p>It is proposed that this should commence with the immediate appointment of a Clerical Officer and that the process be completed within a two year period. In making these appointments it is intended that care be taken to ensure that services can be provided bilingually.</p>
<b>Responsibility</b>	College Management
<b>Implementation</b>	Beginning 2007: Subject to Approval

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.2 Particular need for extra capacity in the areas of Alumni and Archives.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. Filling of vacancies as indicated above would allow these areas to be more adequately developed.
<b>Responsibility</b>	College Management
<b>Implementation</b>	Beginning 2007: Subject to Approval

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.3 Extra staff are also needed to ensure that there is a structure in place for continuity and institutional memory in the event of the SA leaving and also at the end of the term of office of the current President.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed
<b>Responsibility</b>	College Management
<b>Implementation</b>	See above – Beginning 2007, subject to approval

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.4 Reconfiguring of Office space to ensure that the SA has privacy and is not the first point of contact for all phone or personal callers, and should not have to act as “receptionist”	
<b>Our response</b>	Agree in principle. Ways in which this may be achieved will be examined. However, full scale reconfiguration of office space would be likely to be prohibitively expensive. In this event, other options will be explored.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal/Secretary Bursar
<b>Implementation</b>	2007 – see caveat above

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.5 Re-establish senior inter-unit administrative group - thus providing a support network for the SA and improving communication at middle management level.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. An <i>ad hoc</i> HEO group has already been convened. Its membership will now become wider to include a new HEO in Humanities. The procedures, terms of reference and composition of this group will need to be formalised.
<b>Responsibility</b>	AP/HEOs/Management Committee
<b>Implementation</b>	Already implemented.

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.6 Need for Handbook for Staff - this would obviate the need for constant checking with President's Office.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. The production of such a handbook is part of the job specification of the HR manager. In the absence of such a handbook, the President's Office has documented and developed College policies and procedures in a number of areas and disseminated them through the intranet.
<b>Responsibility</b>	HR Manager
<b>Implementation</b>	2007

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.7 Use the strengths of the existing EO - offer a more defined role within the Office... (e.g. an Alumni role).	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed, although it should be noted that this is a half-time position. A role appraisal will be undertaken and responsibilities assigned following consultation and agreement.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal
<b>Implementation</b>	2007

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.8 Have discussions with comparable institutions as a continuation of quality assurance.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. As part of the preparation of this report, staff of the office visited Mary Immaculate College Limerick. It is also planned to visit Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges and to develop and maintain an informal network with relevant staff in these institutions
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal
<b>Implementation</b>	2007 and ongoing

<b>Recommendation</b> 2.9 Need for more focused staff development while acknowledging that this cannot be done until there are more staff.	
<b>Our response</b>	Agreed. Identification of staff development needs is an important part of the new performance management system. A part of this process, a multi-annual schedule will be agreed and structures put in place to facilitate its implementation.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Internal/HR manager
<b>Implementation</b>	Immediately and ongoing

### C. Summary of the Status of the PRG Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
1.1	Put process in motion re clarity of job definitions/ specifications/clarity of roles ..... (a) Organisational Chart (b) President's job description (c) Continuity (d) Sustainability	Management Committee Governing Body Mgt Comm/Governing Body Governing Body	1 year 3 years (2008) 1 year Within 3 years (2008)
1.2	Need to examine work schedules which staff currently feel comfortable with in the light of overall College requirements, particularly as the College grows	President's Office	Immediately and annually
1.3	Need for structure to provide backup in the event of unscheduled absences	President's Office	1 year
1.4	Need for structure which will maintain the institutional memory into future presidencies (a) Systems and procedures (b) Management structure (c) Management training (d) Succession Planning	President/Mgt Committee Management Committee HR Manager Governing Body	Ongoing 1 year 1 year and ongoing Within 3 years
1.5	Need to transfer some responsibilities (a) Transfer of Human Resources duties (b) Development of Student Services area (as per College Strategic Plan)	-- Management Committee	Implemented – 2006 Within 3 years
1.6	Communications/PR & Marketing – an important role that may need a separate post (a) PR (b) Review of internal College communications (c) Marketing	President's Office/HR Management Committee Mgt Committee/ Registrar/Admissions	1 year Within 3 years 1 year
1.7	Student Services (Counselling, Chaplaincy and mature students) – a complex area which needs to be more systematically organised	Management Committee	1 - 3 years
1.8	Consideration might be given in the context of a future review of senior management functions to the possibility of a new post to take responsibility for the above two areas	Management Committee/ Governing Body	Within 3 years

1.9	HR functions appears to be a key issue – attention to ensure that it functions effectively and combines credibility and independence of role with the authority of the President when necessary.	President/Secretary Bursar	Already implemented/ongoing
2.1	Need for additional clerical/admin staff to ensure issues are dealt with in a timely fashion [development of staffing plan]	Management Committee	2007 (subject to approval)
2.2	Particular need for extra capacity in the areas of Alumni and Archives	Management Committee	2007 (subject to approval)
2.3	Extra staff are also needed to ensure that there is a structure in place for continuity and institutional memory in the event of the SA leaving and also at the end of the term of office of the current President	Management Committee	2007 (subject to approval)
2.4	Reconfiguring of Office space to ensure that the SA has privacy and is not the first point of contact for all phone or personal callers, and should not have to act as “receptionist”	President’s Office/Secretary Bursar	2007
2.5	Re-establish senior inter-unit administrative group – thus providing a support network for the SA and improving communication at middle management level	AP/HEOs/Management Committee	Being implemented
2.6	Need for Handbook for Staff – this would obviate the need for constant checking with President’s Office	HR Manager	2007
2.7	Use the strengths of the existing EO – offer a more defined role within the office (e.g. Alumni)	President’s Office	Being implemented
2.8	Have discussions with comparable institutions as a continuation of quality assurance	President’s Office	Being implemented
2.9	Need for more focussed staff development while acknowledging that this cannot be done until there are more staff	President’s Office/HR Manager	2007 and ongoing

**Acronyms used**

SAR - Self-Assessment Report

PRG – Peer Review Group

QA – Quality Assurance

QI – Quality Improvement

HR – Human Resources

AP – Assistant Principal

HEO – Higher Executive Officer

EO – Executive Officer

CO – Clerical Officer