

**ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE**  
(A College of Dublin City University)



**QUALITY PROMOTION  
PROGRAMME 2003/2004**

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**  
for the  
**EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
ADMINISTRATION UNIT**

**21<sup>st</sup> October 2004**



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## **Acronyms Used**

BEd.....	Bachelor of Education
CO .....	Clerical Officer
EO .....	Executive Officer
HEO .....	Higher Executive Officer
PRG .....	Peer Review Group
TP.....	Teaching Practice

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This plan is part of the Quality Review process currently being undertaken by the Education Administration Unit. The Review process commenced in March 2003. From March to December 2003 the Unit reviewed and analysed its services and procedures. Based on this work a Self-Assessment Report was written which was submitted to the Quality Coordinator in January 2004. The Peer-Review Group visited the College in February 2004 and submitted their report in March 2004. This plan arises from that PRG Report.

The Unit Peer-Review Group consisted of:

- Ms Olivia Bree, Assistant Registrar, St Patrick's College (rapporteur)
- Ms Rachel Godfrey, Higher Executive Officer, Arts Office, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- Professor Alan Harrison, Director of Quality Assurance, University College Dublin (chair)
- Ms Pauline Mooney, Senior Faculty Administrator, Faculty of Science and Health, Dublin City University

Over three days (17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> February) the PRG carried out an intensive analysis of the Unit's operations. They met with all Unit staff, student and academic staff groupings, the College President, Bursar and Registrar, the Head of Education and the Human Resource Manager. They also viewed Unit facilities. The Unit wishes to thank the group for their work, which was carried out with great acuity and generosity.

We would also like to thank Bernie Collins (Quality Coordinator) and Sabine O'Dwyer (Quality Administrator) for their support and guidance throughout the process, and Michael O'Leary (Education Department) and Mark Morgan (Head of Education) for their help with the development of survey instruments. We would also like to express our appreciation to all students and staff who gave their time to meet with the peer-review group.

### **1.1 Profile of the Unit**

The Education Administration Unit is staffed by eight fulltime members: a Higher Executive Officer, three Executive Officers and four Clerical Officers. It is attached to the Education Department which has a fulltime staff of 53 academic members, a large cohort of part-time staff, and a student enrolment of 1,792 (at December 2003) on six programmes.

The main responsibilities of the Unit are:

**Student Support** : To provide a comprehensive support service for students enrolled on Education Department courses

**Academic Staff Support** : To provide support services for full and part-time academic staff teaching Education Department courses

**Support to Post-holders in Education** : To facilitate the work of holders of posts of responsibility within the Education Department

**Administration** : To design, implement and review administrative procedures

**Record-keeping** : To maintain department records, including examinations records and computer files

**Examination results** : To collate and validate Education Department examinations results, and respond to queries from students, staff and the Registrar's Office

The Unit is currently allocated four offices, three of which are located in the main administration block. Two of these offices (Education Office and Teaching Practice Office) handle a high volume of student queries. There are two storage areas available to the Unit – one is used for examinations material, one for TP related material.

### **1.2 The Self-Assessment Process**

The Review process occurred at an opportune time for the Unit as it had recently undergone significant change. During the 2002-2003 academic year the appointment of an EO in Examination and Student Services, the filling of the CO in TP post, and a reorganisation of office space enabled the Unit to implement the organisational structure agreed in June 2001. Thus the Quality Review process coincided with a period where the Unit would have had to undertake a substantial assessment and subsequent reorganisation of services in any case.

The permanent members of staff in the Education Department Administration Unit constituted the coordinating committee.

- Evelyn Cuddy, EO Examination and Student Services
- Mairead Dunne, EO Teaching Practice and TP Student Services
- Maeve Fitzpatrick, HEO
- Helen Fleming, CO in Human Development (1/2 time), CO in TP (1/2 time)
- Aoife Myler, Student Services Officer (Education)
- Maria Thornbury, EO Graduate Courses

All Unit staff were actively involved in the self-assessment process.

During the course of the review, the Unit sought feedback from user groups on the following:

- support to full-time staff and students provided by TP and the Education Office
- support to part-time staff provided by the Education Office
- ratings of administrative services and procedures by staff and students

The Unit found the Quality process itself to be a very constructive experience. In particular, the opportunity to be advised by a group of people with the experience and expertise of those who made up our PRG was invaluable.

The Education Department conducted its Quality Review in parallel to the Unit.

## 2. THE PEER-REVIEW GROUP REPORT

Unit staff agree with the findings of the peer-review group and consider the report to be an important part of the continued development of the Unit. The endorsement of our general approach is particularly encouraging. In many respects the findings of the PRG mirror recommendations made within the Unit self-assessment report. However, the report goes further than the self-assessment report in that it makes explicit recommendations related to the broader context within which the Unit operates.

The PRG were initially surprised that the Education Department and the Unit did not undertake a joint review. However, they concluded that two separate review processes 'has been beneficial for the Administration Unit and for our deliberations' (PRG, p. 11). The Unit considered, given the size of the Education Department, that two separate reviews were more practical. We doubt that a joint review process would have resulted in recommendations which so effectively address the structural and organisational issues which are currently hampering Unit operations. However, we fully endorse the PRG suggestion that the next phase would be carried out in tandem.

The PRG report makes seven recommendations which are wholly within the control of the Unit, eight apply to the Unit-Education Department interface, while fifteen are made at College level. This accurately reflects the Unit's situation, that is that change must also occur external to the Unit if it is to continue to enhance the quality of its services. Most specifically, the PRG stressed the importance of setting-up formal structures and improving communication – 17 of the 30 recommendations relate to these areas. The Unit staff fully endorses this emphasis. Given that the Unit has a large and diverse user group and that its operation can be intrinsically dependant on work undertaken within other areas, we feel that a greater degree of formality than has existed in the past is necessary

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS AT UNIT LEVEL

### 3.1 The PRG recommends that the Unit should hold regular team meetings.

**Unit Response :** The Unit fully agrees with this recommendation but would also note that effective team meetings depend on the Unit being kept informed of factors which may affect its operation. Hence we consider that the HEO/College Management meetings need to be reinstated if Unit meetings are to be truly successful (see p. 9).

**Implementation:** Already implemented.  
The Unit introduced regular meetings in March 2004.

### 3.2 The PRG recommends that the Unit introduce a system of internal training for its staff members.

**Unit Response:** The Unit appreciate the benefits to be gained by implementing this recommendation. We consider that it should be closely linked to the Performance Management system currently being piloted.

**Implementation:** To be implemented within the next academic year.

**3.3 The PRG recommends that the Unit investigate the possibility of procedures for early submission of student assignments.**

**Unit Response:** Early submission was restricted in order to ensure the security of the 17,000 assignments handled annually by the Education Office. We agree that a more flexible system is desirable so, on a trial basis, removed the restriction from student handouts in February 2004. The level of demand was such that it didn't unduly interfere with other submissions, hence early submission has been introduced fully.

**Implementation:** Already implemented

**3.4 The PRG recommends that the Unit investigate the possibilities of Irish language classes/training for its staff**

**Unit Response:** Unit staff are committed to the College's bilingual ethos, especially given that 18% of students indicated that they would like to communicate with administrative staff *as Gaeilge*. The College has recently appointed an Oifigeach na Gaeilge who will be asked to help organise training.

**Implementation:** To be implemented within the next academic year.

**3.5 The PRG recommends that a training course in communication skills be organised for Unit staff**

**Unit Response:** Unit staff attending a two-day training course in communication skills during July 2004. This course was designed specifically to deal with issues encountered by Unit staff. It was funded from the Quality Promotion budget. Arising from this, communication protocols to address different types of interaction are being developed on an ongoing basis.

**Implementation:** Already implemented

**3.6 The PRG recommends that ongoing reviews of internal communications and protocols be maintained, especially in respect of Teaching Practice services and procedures.**

**Unit Response:** The Unit intends to continue to review internal communications and protocols on an ongoing basis.

**Implementation:** Already implemented

**3.7 The PRG recommends that the Unit continue to review how information and procedures are notified to students.**

**Unit Response:** The Unit has continued to review its interaction with students and to amend procedures accordingly.

**Implementation:** Already implemented

#### 4. UNIT/DEPARTMENT LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Unit is glad that the PRG noted that the Education Department Administration and Academic staff have a 'clearly excellent relationship'. They are correct in identifying that we lack a 'truly integrated model of operation' and that the ad hoc nature of the current organisational structure causes significant problems for the Unit. Thus, we fully endorse the need for formal structures and greater academic-administration integration.

Education Department and Unit staff attended a conference in early September 2004 during which the Unit/Department level recommendations were discussed.

**4.1 The PRG recommends that, in progressing the outcomes of both reviews, the Department and Unit work closely together, perhaps generating a single Quality Improvement Plan.**

**Unit/Department Response:** Staff fully endorsed this proposal. A Joint Quality Implementation Committee is to be set-up. This committee will be responsible for ensuring that both academic and administrative staff are appropriate represented and consulted during the implementation process.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

**4.2 The PRG recommends that the Unit HEO becomes a full member of the Education Management Committee**

**Implementation:** Already implemented

**4.3 The PRG recommends that, in order to ensure greater clarity regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the HEO and Post-holders, a Committee comprising the Head of Department, HEO and all post-holders be established, the main focus being to clarify roles and responsibilities in relation to the management of administrative matters and identify communication protocols.**

**Unit/Department Response:** This process is in train. However, it was felt that this issue would be more effectively addressed by conducting meetings with each post-holder, and the staff who work with them, to agree protocols. These protocols will then be forwarded to the Education Department Management Committee.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

**4.4 The PRG recommends that a specific Department induction be provided to student groups in which administrative staff would participate, outlining their role and function to students in so far as it relates to them.**

**Unit/Department Response:** This recommendation was agreed.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

- 4.5 The PRG recommend that, as part of induction, the policies and procedures that must operate in relation to TP and the reasons for them be communicated to Graduate Diploma students.**

**Unit Response :** This recommendation was agreed.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

- 4.6 The PRG recommend that there should be administrative representatives on the student-liaison committee**

**Unit/Department Response:** This recommendation was agreed.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

- 4.7 The PRG recommends that the Department consider putting in place a mechanism to facilitate the viewing of scripts in conjunction with the Administration Unit.**

**Unit/Department Response:** Students are entitled to view their scripts under Freedom of Information. Currently, only those students who request feedback or who query their marks are offered this opportunity, i.e. the service isn't advertised. The low uptake indicates that offering this service to all students would be administratively feasible.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year.

- 4.8 The PRG recommends that a system for academic review of examination results should be introduced.**

**Unit/Department Response:** This recommendation was accepted. It was agreed that staff in each pass/fail subject grouping would meet to discuss results.

**Implementation:** To be implemented in the next academic year

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS AT COLLEGE LEVEL**

Unit staff would stress that the recommendations related to HR are of particular importance to the effective operation of the Unit. We also fully support the introduction of performance appraisal under Sustaining Progress.

- 5.1 The PRG recommend that the Head of Unit be included in short listing and/or interview boards for recruitment to the Unit.**

**Unit/Department Response:** This proposal is considered particularly important for the reasons outlined by the PRG. In addition, Unit staff consider that the advertisement of 'generic CO' posts does not fully acknowledge the complexity of administrative roles.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.2 The PRG recommend a review of the number of staff in the Unit with a view to creating a further post if necessary**

**Unit/Department Response :** This is particularly pertinent in the light of the introduction of the taught Doctorate in Education. It was also noted that the allocating of posts to administrative areas needs to occur in a systematic and transparent fashion. It was suggested that an Administrative Staffing Committee should be set-up, its role being to examine staffing levels and to ensure that duties undertaken were consistent with employment grade.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.3 The PRG recommend that the CO in Educational Disadvantage to be upgraded**

**Unit/Department Response :** This was fully supported.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.4 The PRG recommend that HR policies be articulated to all staff clearly**

**Unit/Department Response :** This was fully supported.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.5 The PRG recommend the revival of the Forum between HEOs and Senior Management**

**Unit Response:** There is currently no forum wherein the functioning and development of administration can be discussed with senior College management (i.e. President, Bursar, Registrar). This is essential if the Unit, and indeed College administration as a whole, is to operate effectively. While an Administration Committee was recently established, no members of senior College management serve on it. (In addition, this committee has no decision-making remit.)

The Unit strongly support this recommendation. It is currently operating in a context where it has no formal links whatsoever to senior College management or, indeed, to any other administrative unit.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.6 The PRG recommend that there should be a designated budget for training and development**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.7 The PRG recommend that the College seek to address the problems associated with the location and working conditions of the Educational Disadvantage Office.**

**Unit Response:** Some action has already been taken on this issue. The office has been reorganised to provide more private working space, and has been partly refurbished. However, some additional upgrading is still needed.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.8 The PRG recommends that the College investigate the possibility of locating all the offices of the Unit close to each other**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.9 The PRG recommends that the College investigate the possibility of providing an office that could be used for the compilation of examination results and for confidential consultations.**

**Unit Response:** It is acknowledged that the College is currently short of space and that it may be difficult to implement this, and the previous, recommendation. However, students must currently discuss sensitive information in front of other students and members of administrative staff. In addition, staff can find it difficult to conduct work in busy student offices. Any proposal which can provide privacy for both staff and students would be very welcome.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.10 The PRG recommends that there be a Health and Safety Audit of storage rooms**

**Unit Response:** The Buildings Maintenance Officer was informed immediately that the storage rooms might pose a Health and Safety risk.

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.11 The PRG recommends that both staff common room areas be available to all staff and that the College indicate the desirability of common usage of these.**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.12 The PRG recommends that adequate and consistent signage be provided to the Administration Unit offices.**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.13 The PRG recommends the provision of adequate and suitable notice-board space.**

**Unit Response:** We would suggest that a notice board is provided for each year rather than for each subject. (For example, First Year BEds currently have to check a minimum of five different boards.)

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.14 The PRG commends the College's aspiration to improve its Web page provision and that this be done taking into consideration the overall IT policy of the institution.**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**5.15 The PRG recommends that all offices comply with the needs of wheelchair access.**

**Implementation:** To be decided by College Management.

**6. SUMMARY OF THE STATUS OF THE PRG RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>Recommendations which have already been implemented</b>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Unit	That the Unit hold regular team meetings.
Unit	That early submission of assignments be allowed
Unit	That a training course in communication skills be organised for Unit staff
Unit	That ongoing reviews of internal communications and protocols be maintained, especially in respect of Teaching Practice services and procedures.
Unit	That the Unit continue to review how information and procedures are notified to students.
Unit/Department	That in progressing the outcomes of both reviews, the Department and Unit work closely together, perhaps generating a single Quality Improvement Plan.
Unit/Department	That the Unit HEO becomes a full member of the Education Management Committee

<b>Recommendations to be addressed by College Management</b>
That the Head of Unit be included in short listing and/or interview boards for recruitment to the Unit.
A review of the number of staff in the Unit with a view to creating a further post if necessary
That the CO in Educational Disadvantage to be upgraded
That HR policies be articulated to all staff clearly
The revival of the Forum between HEOs and Senior Management
There should be a designated budget for training and development
The College seek to address the problems associated with the location and working conditions of the Educational Disadvantage Office.
The College investigate the possibility of locating all the offices of the Unit close to each other
The College investigate the possibility of providing an office that could be used for the compilation of examination results and for confidential consultations.
That there be a Health and Safety Audit of storage rooms
That both staff common room areas be available to all staff and that the College indicate the desirability of common usage of these.
That adequate and consistent signage be provided to the Administration Unit offices.
The PRG commends the College's aspiration to improve its Web page provision and that this be done taking into consideration the overall IT policy of the institution.

**Education Administration Unit Quality Improvement Plan**

<b>Recommendations to be implemented within next Academic Year</b>				
<b>Level</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Time frame</b>	<b>Cost Implications</b>
Unit	That a system of internal training is introduced	HEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oct-Dec 04 Development of internal training procedures, with reference to Performance Evaluation and Unit staff requirements.</li> <li>• Jan-May 05 Piloting of internal training system.</li> <li>• July-Aug 05 Review of System</li> </ul>	Likely to be some additional training requirements but these could be met from the College training budget.
Unit	That the possibility of Irish language class and training be investigated	HEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nov 04 Oifigeach na Gaeilge to be asked to provide information on Irish language classes</li> <li>• Classes to begin for at least some staff by Jan 05</li> </ul>	Likely that any training costs will be met from College training budget Overtime costs may arise if classes are organised outside of normal working hours
Unit/Department	Greater clarity regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the HEO and Post-holders	EDMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sept 04 Administrative staff draft protocols</li> <li>• Oct-Nov 04 All groups of post-holders, admin staff who work with them, HEO and Head of Department meet to complete and agree protocols</li> <li>• Nov 04 Protocols to be forwarded to Education Department Management Committee</li> <li>• July 04 Review of protocols</li> </ul>	None
Unit/Department	That specific Department induction on administration be provided	EDMC		
Unit/Department	That the policies and procedures that must operate in relation to TP and the reasons for them be communicated to Graduate Diploma students.	EDMC		
Unit/Department	The PRG recommend that there should be administrative staff on the student-liaison committee	EDMC		
Unit/Department	The PRG recommends that the Department consider putting in place a mechanism to facilitate the viewing of scripts in	EDMC		

**Education Administration Unit Quality Improvement Plan**

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<b>Recommendations to be implemented within next Academic Year</b>				
<b>Level</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Time frame</b>	<b>Cost Implications</b>
	conjunction with the Administration Unit.			
Unit/Department	The PRG recommends that a system for academic review of examination results should be introduced.	EDMC		