



COLÁISTE MHIURE GAN SMÁL | MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
- OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH - | - UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK -

Mary Immaculate College Students Union

Peer Review

April 7th – 10th 2008

Peer Review Report



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1.0 Background

1.1 Quality at MIC

MIC has always been committed to ensuring the very highest standards of excellence in its teaching, learning and research activities.

The MIC Quality Office endeavours to promote and facilitate continual quality improvement across all the college's academic and administrative units.

The Quality Office has responsibility for the establishment and implementation of procedures directed at maintaining and improving quality. To achieve this, the Quality Office:

- Supports the development of college policy and procedures in relation to quality assurance and improvement in line with best international practice
- Develops, maintains and evaluates the college's academic and administrative review processes while promoting a sense of ownership by each individual department
- Provides the necessary help and support to all departments in implementing the quality review process

The main aim of the quality assurance process is quality improvement. In common with other institutions, the procedures employed by MIC have three main stages: self-assessment, peer review and quality improvement.

The MIC approach to quality is informed by *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities*¹, the joint Irish Universities Association (IUA) and Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) publication on quality in Irish universities.

1.2 Quality Committee

The Quality Review process at MIC is overseen by a representative, college-wide committee called the Quality Committee (QC). The QC functions as a committee of the College's Executive.

¹ Irish Universities Association & Irish Universities Quality Board (2007), *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities: Concerted Action for Institutional Improvement*, Dublin: IUA & IUQB.



1.3 The Quality Review Process

The Quality Review Process at MIC is as follows:

Self Assessment

A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is drawn up under appropriate headings by the unit under review. The SAR remains confidential to the unit, the peer reviewers and the Quality Office throughout the quality review process.

Peer Review

The SAR is sent to the Peer Review Group (PRG). The members of the PRG read the SAR and spend a number of days on a site visit to the unit. The PRG typically consists of two internal peer reviewers - MIC representatives who are not closely associated with the unit under review, and two external peer reviewers - one national expert and one international expert. The review group completes a Peer Review Report (PRR) on its findings which comprises both commendations and recommendations. These are communicated verbally to the unit at the end of the site visit. No new items may be added once the PRG has verbally communicated the PRR to the unit. Immediately after the visit the PRR is sent to the Quality Office which forwards it to the unit to check for factual errors. Once this is complete the PRR is finalised.

Follow-Up

The unit reviews the PRR and produces a version that includes their responses to each of the commendations and recommendations made.

For Academic Departments the relevant Faculty Dean reviews the PRR with the Units' responses and adds his/her responses to each of the commendations and recommendations made. The PRR, with the responses of both the Unit and the Faculty Dean, is then reviewed by the Vice President Academic Affairs who adds his/her responses to each of the commendations and recommendations made.

For Administrative / Support Units the appropriate Vice President (VP) reviews the PRR with the Units' responses and adds his/her responses to each of the commendations and recommendations made.

The PRR with the responses is then presented to a succession of college bodies and finally to An Bord Rialaithe (Governing Body). Permission is sought from An Bord Rialaithe to make the report publicly available. Once permission is granted the PRR is made publicly available via the MIC Quality Web Site.



Quality Improvement

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is drawn up by the unit based on the planned improvements outlined in the SAR and the recommendations and commendations given in the PRR and the responses.

The unit performs periodic reviews of the implementation of the QIP and updates the QIP accordingly.



2.0 MIC Students' Union

2.1 Overview

The Mary Immaculate College Students' Union (MICSU) provides support, representation and services for its members, the students of MIC. The Students' Union represents the student body in negotiations with college staff and management and with other organisations on a local, national and international level.

Students are represented by the elected Students' Union Executive Committee officers. The Union is administered by the General Manager, the Student Activities Officer, a full-time term-time administrator and part-time staff.

The mission statement of the Students' Union is as follows:

Giving you a voice, helping you to use it, enriching your college experience

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The aims of the Students' Union are:

- To give students a say in their own student/college life
- To protect and represent students in academic and non-academic matters
- To create a positive college experience for students
- To help new students integrate into college life
- To facilitate extra-curricular activities for students

The Students' Union strives to achieve its aims through the following objectives:

- Work collaboratively with all college departments to ensure that key strategic relationships are developed and maintained
- Provide assistance, information, services, guidance, security and entertainments for the student population
- Provide the best possible balance between academic and social experiences
- Be an approachable and welcoming point of contact for students, even just for a chat
- Encourage increased student participation in extra-curricular activities
- Improve the college physical environment, e.g. the planned Student Centre

2.3 User Groups

While the Students' Union offers services to staff, visitors and graduates of MIC, students of the college make up its key customer group. In addition to services to students, the Students' Union provides services to graduates through its website, through merchandising and by organising the graduation social events. Through its on-campus shop, An Siopa, the Union provides a service to the college community as a whole. The Union supports the college authorities by assisting with orientation, graduation and open days.



Further information on the MICSU is available on www.micsu.ie .

3.0 Membership of the MICSU Peer Review Group

Mr. Barney Hughes	General Manager, Students' Union, Queens University Belfast;
Ms. Una Redmond	Manager, Student Life Dublin City University;
Ms. Rachel Godfrey	HEO - Arts Office, MIC;
Ms. Dorothy Morrissey	Lecturer, MIC;

4.0 Membership of MICSU Quality Team (MICSUQT)

Ms. Orla Banks	MICSU General Manager
Ms. Louise Quinn	MICSU Student Activities Officer
Mr. Robert O'Halloran	MICSU President
Mr. Thomas Kennedy	MICSU Vice President



5.0 Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

The Peer Review Group (PRG) wishes to acknowledge the hospitality extended to it by the MIC Quality Office, MIC Students' Union, the MIC Students' Union stakeholders and College staff over a period of three days. The PRG commends MICSU for its voluntary participation in the quality review process. It was evident to the PRG that the members of MICSU are enthusiastic, upbeat, positive and fully engaged with the review process.

The SAR of MICSU provided the PRG with a comprehensive and honest picture of the unit and a clear starting point for discussion. MICSU has already achieved considerable success in service delivery and we are confident that this should continue in its new location. There is, however, a lack of awareness among students about the extent to which student activities are funded by the commercial activities of the SU.

The Students' Union could benefit from the development of a higher profile among College staff and the local community.



6.0 The Report of the Peer Review Group

6.1 Environment and Facilities

Commendations

6.1.1	The PRG recognises that an exceptional level of service is provided, despite the obvious limitations of the physical environment
6.1.2	The PRG recognises the high level of motivation and commitment to the Students' Union ethos displayed by the staff and student officers, despite their poor working environment.
6.1.3	The PRG recognises the efforts of the Students' Union in securing a key location in the new Student Centre. This location will further facilitate the role of the Students' Union as an integral part of campus life, thereby enhancing the student experience. This should reinforce the esteem in which the Students' Union is currently held by College management.

Recommendations

6.1.4	That consideration be given to relocating "An Siopa" in the proposed Student Centre layout, in order to maximise the commercial potential.
6.1.5	That consideration be given to alternative uses of the space currently assigned to the Student Lounge. The Students' Union should consider options which will facilitate further involvement in student activities, thereby increasing footfall in the Centre.
6.1.6	That the Students' Union assign a specific budget for shop design and fit-out to maximise commercial potential.
6.1.7	That the proposed layout of office and meeting room space be redesigned to facilitate use outside of normal office hours.
6.1.8	That the Students' Union should have an active involvement in the management of the Student Centre.
6.1.9	That the Students' Union should take advantage of any additional retail or other service delivery opportunities which may arise in the future operation of the Student Centre.
6.1.10	That the Students' Union develop a programme of events to encourage students to use the foyer/forum as a social space. This has a twofold advantage since it meets a stated demand for social meeting space and promotes awareness of the Students' Union and its activities to the student body.



6.2 User Services

Commendations

6.2.1	The PRG commends the high levels of motivation evident in staff and student officers.
6.2.2	The PRG notes the relative high level of electoral turnout and general involvement in student democracy.
6.2.3	The PRG notes the very positive perception of the Students' Union office despite the appalling physical environment.
6.2.4	The PRG notes the excellent level of customer service, sound financial performance, and welcoming atmosphere created in An Siopa, despite the appalling physical environment.
6.2.5	The PRG applauds the innovative approach and added value created by the appointment of a Student Activities Officer, as exemplified by the Love It and Leave It and PASS initiatives.

Recommendations

6.2.6	That the electoral system be systematically reviewed to address issues such as gender imbalance of elected officers, the title of the Vice President/Education, the position of the Returning Officer and the BA/B.Ed. imbalance.
6.2.7	That the class rep system be reviewed with emphasis on raising awareness, developing the liaison aspect with College units/offices/staff, and the provision of appropriate training for reps.
6.2.8	That consideration be given to the appointment of a manager/supervisor for An Siopa. This would allow the General Manager to concentrate on other issues.
6.2.9	That the Students' Union puts in place a programme to raise its profile among College staff, the local community, and the student body by highlighting its successes and values.
6.2.10	That the Students' Union opens discussions with relevant parties with a view to establishing improved communications with its members via all student email and class mail, etc.
6.2.11	That the Students' Union gives immediate priority to the complete overhaul of its website. A specific resource must be put in place to manage the content of the website.
6.2.12	That the Students' Union review its publication strategy and consider availing of internal and/or external expertise with particular emphasis on staff training and development.
6.2.13	That the Students' Union develop a logo to promote its unique identity. This will be particularly important in the context of its proposed new location.



6.2.14	That the Students' Union has access to available communication tools, e.g. plasma screens, in key student activity areas, in order to better promote its activities.
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6.3 Organisation and Management

Commendations

6.3.1	The PRG recognises that the establishment of the Advisory Group has been a positive development.
6.3.2	The PRG acknowledges that there is a sound financial management system in place and that funds have been handled prudently, which has allowed the Students' Union to contribute to the proposed new Student Centre. This has been achieved in a climate where many Students' Unions are experiencing a range of financial challenges.
6.3.3	The PRG applauds the establishment of a strong staff-sabbatical team approach to the delivery of Students' Union services. This was evident from feedback from all stakeholders who participated in this process.

Recommendations

6.3.4	That the Advisory Group continues to meet regularly and develops its role in the provision of an important support mechanism. It should seek to provide expertise not normally available in the Students' Union.
6.3.5	That a suitable performance appraisal system is identified and implemented, recognising the uniqueness of the employment situation of the General Manager. Any such system must support the personal and professional development of the General Manager and should subsequently be applied to all staff.
6.3.6	That a staff development plan be introduced to include a system for continuous training needs analysis and professional development.
6.3.7	That a strategic plan is devised which takes into account the opportunities presented by the relocation to the new Student Centre. Any such plan should consider the views of all relevant stakeholders and should have an annual (at least) review mechanism built in.
6.3.8	That the executive team, assisted by the General Manager, prepare an annual Plan-of-Work, which is adequately resourced, within the existing funding envelope. This should be reviewed on a six-monthly basis.
6.3.9	That a student survey is conducted on an annual basis. The findings of the survey should inform strategic planning, including the Plan-of-Work.