

Trinity College Dublin



Provost's Report to Council on the Review of the Office of the Vice-Provost

SECTION A

Introduction

This report presents the outcome of a review of the Office of the Vice-Provost. An external peer review visitation was undertaken from the 25th – 27th May 2011 by Ms Carolyn Fowler, Registrar and Secretary, Durham University; Mr Jon Baldwin, Registrar, University of Warwick, and Professor Paul Giller, Registrar and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University College Cork. The internal facilitator was Professor John O'Hagan, Trinity College Dublin.

The main purpose of the review is (a) to provide a structured opportunity for the area to reflect on its activities and plans for development, while benefiting from a constructive commentary by senior colleagues external to College; (b) to ensure that quality and standards in administration, management and service provision are being maintained and enhanced and that areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed.

Overview of the Area

Structure

The Office of the Vice-Provost (OVP) comprises a number of units and offices which collectively have operational responsibility for an extensive range of functions associated with the College's central academic management which represent most, but not all, of the functions that fall within the remit of the Vice-Provost in his/her capacity as Chief Academic Officer of the College. As well as managing functions in respect of the student-lifecycle, the OVP also plays a significant role in the development and implementation of academic policy and strategic planning.

In 2010, a re-organisation of the OVP along broadly functional lines was undertaken with a view to better positioning the various functional areas to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan and prepare for the implementation of a new student information system. The consolidation of staff around related functions in the face of budget cuts and staffing constraints was also a consideration. Currently the key functions associated with the various constituent parts of the OVP are grouped under four sections, each with a head of area. The four sections are as follows:

- (a) Central Academic Administration Services
- (b) Academic and Curriculum Development Unit
- (c) Academic Secretariat, and
- (d) Student Administration System User Support Unit (SUSU).

Staffing

The current staffing complement amounts to 63.7 fulltime equivalents (FTEs).

Thirty two percent (32%) of staff are on either fixed-term contracts or contracts of indefinite duration, 57% are on administrative grades, while 43% are on executive officer grades.

Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The various offices and units within the OVP are spread over a number of different locations on and off the main campus. Accessibility of office space to the College community and members of the public is less than ideal; only the Admissions Office (UG), Student and Graduate Records, and the Graduate Studies Office enjoy ground floor accommodation. Many of the functions continue to be housed in 18th century houses, which although centrally located, provide very little flexibility in usage and are for the most part over-crowded. Storage is always a problem.

The location of offices is currently as set out below:

Location	Function(s)
Front Square, ground floor offices in Houses 4 and 5, and Regent House	Admissions (UG), Student and Graduate Records.
Front Square, West Theatre:	Vice-Provost's Office (1 st Floor), Academic Secretariat (1 st & 3 rd Floors), Examinations Office (1 st & 2 nd Floors), Quality Office, Student Surveys (2 nd Floor), Curriculum Development (including Academic Practice & Bologna Desk) (2 nd & 3 rd Floors), Senior Lecturer and Registrar (2 nd Floor).
Arts Building:	Graduate Studies.
Goldsmith Hall (off campus):	Trinity Access Programme.
Foster Place (off campus):	E-Learning (CLT) National Digital Learning Resources (NDLR), Academic Practice Seminar Room.
O'Reilly Institute:	Centre for Women in Science and Engineering Research (WISER).
Apollo House	GeneSIS Project Team

SECTION B

Report of the External Reviewers

1. Background

1.1 The Review of the Office of the Vice-Provost took place between 25th and 27th May 2011 with a review team comprising Dr. Jon Baldwin, Registrar, University of Warwick, Professor Paul Giller, Registrar and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University College Cork and Ms Carolyn Fowler, Registrar and Secretary, Durham University.

1.2 Prior to the Review the Team received an extensive pack of information central to which was the self-assessment document and its ten appendices the production of which was co-ordinated by the Academic Secretary.

Supporting documentation included:

OVP Self Assessment report with its associated 10 Appendices; the TCD Strategic Plan; a copy of the previous (1999) Administrative Review of the Senior Lecturer's area; background briefing document on TCD for External reviewers; some organisational management charts related to management, Committee, Academic and Administrative structures; undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses.

During the course of the review, additional documentation was provided reflecting further material and new material requested by the Team (e.g. Organisational chart for the COO area and extensive details relating to the GeneSIS project).

1.3 The overall organisation of the review by the Quality Office was very good and the Review team are extremely grateful to the Office for its support, arrangements and management of the visit.

1.4 The schedule of meetings is attached as Appendix 1. The programme was comprehensive but, inevitably, some of the meetings proved too short. The splitting of the panel to encompass discussions with all areas whilst understandable, was not ideal.

1.5 The terms of reference of the review were to consider:

- i) how effective the area has been in providing a service to its clients/users;
- ii) how effective the area has been in meeting its overall aims and objectives;
- iii) the effectiveness of processes designed to ensure that the area continues to meet the needs of its client groups;
- iv) the value of the service as perceived by the area and its users in the context of the overall College activities and services provided to students;
- v) the effectiveness of processes designed to ensure that the department makes effective use of feedback on the service that it provides;
- vi) what changes in practice should be recommended to further improve to the quality of the services offered;
- vii) how the department develops and maintains the competence of its staff;

- viii) the appropriateness of the objectives of the department in relation to the mission statement of College;
- ix) the effectiveness of each department's organisational structures and procedures e.g. management arrangements, resources and future plans;
- x) how the department identifies and responds to the external and internal developments that impact on the services that it offers.

2. Introduction and General Impressions

- 2.1 The Team were taken with the commitment of the majority of staff with whom we met and by their energy and pride in working at and for Trinity. There was an openness and frankness in our exchanges borne of a general determination to "do a good job" and to develop and improve the way in which that job was undertaken. The workforce appears to be a strong one.
- 2.2 Trinity though, like all Universities, is complex. As the Administrative Review of the Senior Lecturer's area noted in 1999 "structures often evolve in keeping with the issues, pressures and personalities of the time and organisational features peculiar to the College may be as effective as administrative arrangements commonly found elsewhere". This is true but (relatively) recent changes in College offer a moment upon which some general reflection may be helpful.
- 2.3 Academic leadership may be overly distributed, contributing to a culture where administrative management and leadership appears suppressed. The Academic Secretary has standing and presence and is well known and networked (within and beyond the Office of the Vice-Provost) but beneath her, it proved difficult to identify who is 'in charge', in control of the various systems, processes and procedures, and, indeed who wants to be so described. It was put to us that "the administration has always been treated as second class" in Trinity. The overly distributed academic leadership also results in a lack of clarity and occasionally in some confusion.
- 2.4 The implementation of decisions is deeply problematic. As one academic leader interviewee put it, "we're not very good at making decisions but we're appalling at implementing them". The locus of decision making and their subsequent implementation is often elusive in a University but it appears to be particularly elusive in Trinity. A constant agenda of change and re-organisation overlaid with a very challenging economic environment seems to have added insufficient general value to date to the extent that further change is contemplated. There is a strong sense that the administration has been waiting; waiting in particular for the outcomes of the mid-term review of academic restructuring undertaken in 2010 (which were not made available to the panel). The academic administration is awaiting the commencement of a process of general administrative reform.
- 2.5 There appears to be little sense of partnership between the administration and the academy. Relations are strained and the administration appears to lack legitimacy. There is evidence of squabbling and wasted effort. Administrative managers in the OVP appear to have difficulty in managing and implementing decisions and overlaps between various roles are not helpful. Administrators do not on the whole feel led towards specific goals; do not feel that they belong to a professional services cadre which works alongside the academy to deliver first class support for them and an excellent student experience. There is tension between 'College', Schools and Faculties. Tension, confusion, even opposition. This must be addressed and the

appointment of a new Chief Operating Officer (COO) with responsibility for a unified set of central services provides a significant opportunity.

- 2.6 The appointment of the COO represents just one change. There is to be a new Provost and a new Vice-Provost. Staff are aware of the need to do more with less under the current Government imposed financial and staffing constraints and of the need to implement the GeneSIS project with great skill, tenacity and in a way that develops and retains the ownership of all Stakeholders.
- 2.7 As in all Universities, support services must be resourced in the most efficient and effective way but general budgetary reductions that have been proposed for the administration may mask the need to re-distribute focus within the institution in a way that aligns with institutional strategy and resolves process bureaucracy. Any such budget reductions must be carefully thought through.
- 2.8 Trinity works. It is a fine institution populated by talented and committed people. How it works is less clear. In the following sections of the report these various issues are considered in greater detail.

3. Thematic Issues

3.1 Leadership and Management

- 3.1.1 The academic administrative leadership at TCD has been distributed amongst administrative officers including Chief Operations Officer, Academic Secretary, Heads of Offices in the Office of the Vice Provost, and academic officers and champions that include the Vice Provost, Senior Lecturer, Registrar, Dean of Graduate Studies, Directors of Teaching and Learning at both undergraduate level and postgraduate level, Senior Tutor, Academic Director of CAPSL, Academic Advisors and Heads of Schools.
- 3.1.2 The two phases of academic restructuring overlaid on pre-existing academic administrative and officer posts would appear to have led to overly-distributed leadership and a confusion of roles and responsibilities, as perceived by both academic and administrative staff and students. Hence problems arise in lines of communication, responsibility and in the implementation of decisions. This seems particularly evident in the implementation of aspects of the strategic plan (e.g. non-EU student recruitment targets). The term 'hybrid system' was used by several staff to describe the current organisational structure, as administrative restructuring has apparently been placed on hold.
- 3.1.3 Many of the staff we interviewed (both Administrative and Academic officers) described policy development and responsibility for its implementation as a 'grey area'. Administrative Offices may be charged with the implementation of policy but indicate that they have little power to do so if there is resistance at the academic unit level (examples include decision on turnaround time for non-EU applications, introduction of Learning Outcomes, development of a Postgraduate Book of Modules). There is also a self-confessed lack of clarity around how administrative offices can support individual academic officers, leading to further overlap in activities within the OVP.

- 3.1.4 The strategic plan has been described by some as a 'top down' instrument which appears to have relatively limited traction at academic and administrative unit level. What the institution wants to be delivered does not appear to be well understood.
- 3.1.5 One conclusion that can be drawn from this is the need for better alignment of reporting relationships with functional responsibilities. For example, at the higher level, the OVP has all its major functional relationships with the VP and Academic Officers yet it reports through the COO. There were many examples of dual or even multi-reporting lines that would tend to exaggerate these difficulties.
- 3.1.6 A second conclusion is the need to provide greater clarity around the strategic leadership levers at Institutional level. Who drives policy development, who is responsible for implementation and who are they, in turn, accountable to?
- 3.1.7 Thirdly, there was clear identification by senior staff of the need to provide the appropriate and necessary authority to individuals to implement and carry responsibility to deliver. The point that was being made, and is evident to the Review Team, is that too many individuals have the de facto power to delay implementation of decisions already approved by the Board and Council of the College.
- 3.1.8 This situation is exemplified in the programme structures across the University. The long tradition of academic autonomy at School/Department level has led to significant variation in marks and standards, regulations, programme format, terminology, assessment, pass and progression rules and nature of course information, which challenges administrative attempts to provide standardised data, information sets, advice etc. Whilst academically some degree of variation is appropriate on a disciplinary/professional basis, it can, where excessive, lead to fragmentation, concerns over fairness to students, excessive administrative workloads and duplication. Such concerns were expressed to the Review Team during various meetings with staff. It is recognised that this level of variation in regulations, data sets and formats and programme structures cannot be supported within the emerging GeneSIS project. Experience in other institutions points to the need to establish an appropriate balance between centralised and devolved functions and authority to ensure integrated, effective and efficient functions and processes that support internal and external stakeholders.

3.2 Space and Office Accommodation

- 3.2.1 One of the biggest challenges raised by staff was the need to deliver spatial integration of offices and easier accessibility to stakeholders. Under the current situation various administrative elements tend to work in silos, the isolation resulting in a large part from spatial separation. Duplication of work is evident as it is often quite fragmented with little feedback between areas. There is recognition of the need for integration of work practices that would allow any staff member to undertake a variety of roles.
- 3.2.2 As an example, not only is the Central Academic Administrative Services (CAAS) group spread across a number of buildings, but the Undergraduate Admissions and Student Recruitment Office, consisting of 6 staff, is itself spread across three

separate buildings. Further, potentially beneficial spatial integration that would lead, in turn, to functional efficiencies and enhancement, could arise in the overall admissions function which is currently split across 5 separate areas along with the integration of Fees and Records Offices. Similarly, there are separate offices dealing with different aspects of the programme approval process, which contributes to the extended time scales of the process.

- 3.2.3 The small size of offices was also raised as an issue. Unfortunately the Review Panel did not have the opportunity to view office provision and see the difficulties at first hand. However, as we moved between locations for meetings, we saw evidence of some very under-utilised space, for example in Apollo House and at Foster Place. This suggests that the problem may not one be one of space availability per se, but rather how space utilisation is prioritised and organised across College-wide departmental boundaries.

3.3 Staffing

- 3.3.1 Throughout the review process, the review team met with many OVP staff who have, without exception, demonstrated a high level of commitment to and pride in the College. Recognising the challenging resource environment within which College is operating, and the significant organisational and other changes experienced in recent years, we have been impressed by the high levels of motivation and engagement of the administrative staff. The academic staff who the review team met, whilst having concerns reflected elsewhere in this report, spoke very highly of individual members of OVP staff.
- 3.3.2 A number of staff expressed themselves as being in a 'holding pattern'; expecting further changes and an administrative restructuring, but noting that this was pending completion of the academic restructuring, and the implementation phase of the GeneSIS project. Some managers we spoke to expressed some frustration at the constraints imposed by various HR regulations and practices in achieving significant restructuring. However, we found a clear expectation amongst staff that there would be further change, and a willingness to engage with this. It is our view therefore that, notwithstanding regulatory constraints, much could be achieved through early and genuine College engagement with the administrative staff of the OVP on the business needs of the OVP and the ways in which those needs might best be met.
- 3.3.3 In terms of staff headcount, the review team found the OVP extremely lean. For an institution of this size and ambition, the numbers of staff supporting the academic administration are relatively low, particularly within the core registry functions. There is a risk that any further cuts in OVP staff numbers would severely impact College's ability to deliver the improvements to the student experience which are needed, and threaten the successful implementation of the GeneSIS project.
- 3.3.4 However, the balance of staffing within the OVP might be reviewed against two considerations. Firstly, the structure seems top-heavy. There is a relatively high number of administrative grade staff compared to executive officer grade staff, and a flatter structure than one might expect. The embedding of the new office structure and creation of effective teams might be assisted by the introduction of a more

hierarchical structure which combines clearly identified management and supervisory roles with more flexible junior roles. Such a structure might also help to address the frustration with a lack of clear career development opportunities which we heard from some staff. Secondly, through the better integration of offices into functional teams, much of the duplication of work may be overcome, thus offering the opportunity to refocus workload to address identified deficits in capacity.

3.4.1 Staff Development

- 3.4.1 The terms of reference for the review invite us to comment upon the adequacy of staff development arrangements. We found no evidence of a consistent approach to staff development, and would suggest that this needs to be given higher priority at a time of change and where individuals are being asked to take on new and different roles.
- 3.4.2 It is evident from the Self Assessment document and discussions with staff that a key challenge facing the institution at present is around **change management**. We heard evidence of some poor practice in change management previously, which has created an environment in which there is a lack of confidence in College's ability to successfully implement its strategic and policy decisions. This environment presents a particular risk to the GeneSIS project. Change management training for staff in leadership and management positions could support the improvement needed in this area.
- 3.4.3 **Team building** is a second key issue which emerged from the review. The recent restructuring of the OVP into four main functional teams is generally logical in terms of the groupings created. However, the staff we met are conscious that they are not yet operating as teams, and are still working day to day within the confines of the previous fragmented operational and spatial structure. In a situation where accommodation constraints mitigate to some extent against bringing people together, it is imperative to find additional ways to address this issue, such as regular team meetings and team building sessions.
- 3.4.4 Finally, feedback from users, particularly students, indicated that the OVP does not always meet the high standards of customer service which might be expected. The students we met accepted that staff were working with inadequate IT systems and made some allowances for this, but nevertheless they felt that improvements could be made to the service they receive from those staff who regularly take student enquiries. **Customer service** training for this group of staff could be valuable.

4. Organisational Areas

4.1. Central Academic Administrative Services

4.1.1. Trinity Access Programme

TAP has facilitated the development of Trinity's reputation and profile in widening participation and the staff presented strong evidence of academic engagement with its services. Whilst that is, in itself, unsurprising, there was a strong view that the unit was somewhat mis-located in the Office of the Vice-Provost, particularly in CAAS given the

proper process focus of the other units located there. Recognising that the creation of a separate Centre for Engagement and Community Participation was unlikely, a preference was expressed to consider the creation of a post of Director of Student Services reporting to the Chief Operating Officer into which TAP could in turn report. There may be merit in such a suggestion but if it is to be considered, it should be looked at in the context of comments elsewhere in this report about the complexity of the existing management structure.

Also notable was the success of the unit in securing scholarship and general philanthropic income.

4.1.2. Undergraduate Admissions

In the Undergraduate Admissions team we found a group of very able, motivated and focused staff. Their operational challenges are in the paper-based systems required for direct entrants, and in the compilation of statistics which is made difficult by the fragmented nature of the underlying systems. The team is looking to the GeneSIS project to address these issues.

The team was also hoping that GeneSIS would deliver both a new web content management system and Customer Relationship Management capability. It will be important to ensure that all staff are aware of the scope of GeneSIS such that expectations are realistic. The team might also be encouraged to think creatively about the use of other solutions in the meantime, for example the use of Facebook and other social media to keep in touch with applicants.

It was noted that there is a fragmented approach to recruitment and admissions in College, with separate admissions points for Undergraduate, Postgraduate, International and Access/TAP students, and the recruitment for some Schools/individual programmes being managed separately. This over-distribution of the function would appear to lead to a lack of coordination between the Centre and the Schools in relation to recruitment, exacerbated by the fact that websites are under the ownership of each separate area. There is a single recruitment/school liaison officer based in the OVP who works substantially independently. He has limited links to the TAP or School-based recruitment staff. Consideration might be given as to whether his role should be re-focused onto co-ordination of College-wide recruitment activity in order to deliver maximum value from the resources deployed in this area.

The team felt that recruitment and admissions might work more effectively if these functions carried out by themselves, Graduate Studies and the International Office were merged. However, there was some concern about this expressed by both the Graduate Studies office and International Office with respect to the need to retain key skills and specialist expertise. We suggest that in the short term the admissions office structure is maintained as at present pending the implementation of revised business processes under GeneSIS, at which point it would be appropriate to review the position.

4.1.3. Postgraduate Admissions

Whilst there was an understanding of the discussions concerning the centralisation of admissions processes there was a concern that this may work less well at Postgraduate level. It would be important not to lose the inherent flexibility of Postgraduate admissions decisions via the implementation of a formula driven system. The intention to protect the relationship between candidates and academic admissions tutors is therefore welcome.

4.1.4. International Office

Whilst not part of the reporting structure of the OVP, the International Office has clear functional relationships through recruitment and admissions, programme portfolios and student experience. The Office undertakes marketing, promotion and recruitment of non-EU students, partnership development and support of European programmes. Operationally the Office reports to the COO but functionally the Director interacts with the Vice Provost.

A number of issues were raised during the discussions, the key ones being fragmentation/duplication in delivery of services, misalignment between university strategic goals and operational delivery at School level and lack of integration and institutional alignment in marketing functions.

There appears to be duplication in the admissions process between the International Office and Admissions Office which can lead to delays in offers, which are often significantly further exacerbated at School level. The University Strategic plan highlights a target of 1000 additional non-EU students and in support of this Academic Council decided on rolling admissions and a maximum 2-week turnaround of applications. However, Faculties have identified a capacity for only 75 additional students and the Academic Council decision is not being implemented in many Schools. Strategic targets do not seem to be shared targets. This misalignment between strategic goals and operational delivery will undoubtedly inhibit the Office from achieving its targets. It was suggested that there should be a single area responsible for non-EU admissions, carrying a strong customer service element.

The lack of institutional brand management or an integrated marketing function was also highlighted.

A final problem raised related to insufficient integrated support between offices in relation to the handling of non-EU postgraduate students, who get 'ping-ponged' between offices as the necessary information for students is not held in one place.

4.1.5. Graduate Studies

Comment on the Graduate Studies Office was a feature of a number of conversations with both academic and administrative colleagues. From the obvious focus of discussions with members of the office itself and the session with the Dean of Graduate Studies, the work of the office drew comment from the Directors of Postgraduate teaching and learning and from other academic staff.

The Dean was complimentary about the support she received from the staff. Great pride and commitment was evident from the staff and a disappointment with the satisfaction survey scores had led to a process of introspection and an acknowledgement that some of the core processes overseen by the office could be improved. That commitment to improve was impressive.

Discussion focused on the reasons for customer dissatisfaction and it was acknowledged that a public service mentality had led to some silo working in Graduate Studies and related offices and so it was important that a customer service focus was introduced and regularly reinforced. Disconnected College communication channels were also cited as problematic in terms of the dissemination of key plans, messages and requirements.

The Innovation academy designed in partnership with University College Dublin particularly to develop skills of entrepreneurship in PhD students had been introduced successfully and appeared to be worth considering as a positive case study (albeit a small one) of how change can be successfully contemplated and implemented.

4.1.6 Registration, Student and Graduate Records and Examinations

The session with colleagues in this office was thoughtful and reflective. Consistent with other offices, there was a recognition of a need to improve, a realism about the potential risks and rewards associated with the GeneSIS project and frustration at the way in which demands of the State left staff with little choice over immediate priorities whilst colouring the views of academic colleagues. A very experienced Exams Officer reflected openly on the delivery of a less than optimal student service; processes required regular (and risky) double (or more) entry of data and there was far too much manual production of documentation in the Student Records Office. Some loss of institutional memory added to a sense of frustration and it was evident that the operational continually obscured the strategic.

Morale though remained high. Working at Trinity was described as “magic” and opportunities to learn and develop were never far away. That said, the absence of a clear career structure across the range of administrative areas risked the stifling of talent and was a source of frustration particularly for Executive Officers who saw no obvious place to which to progress.

4.2 Academic and Curriculum Development Unit

4.2.1. Quality Team

The Quality Team is responsible for operating quality reviews of Schools and administrative areas under the Quality Assurance Framework for universities in Ireland. They indicated that they organise and oversee between four and six reviews a year. The team of three (2.5FTE) also runs student surveys and prepares student retention statistics.

The Quality team was conscious of the lack of team working within the Academic and Curriculum Development Unit to which they belong and felt that the restructuring was still a work in progress. They emphasised the duplication and fragmentation in administrative work within the College and the lack of appropriate feedback between areas. They perceived huge potential for better team working but did not feel that this was yet in place.

The review team was fortunate to experience at first hand the very high quality and intensive support provided to the quality review process. While this is commendable, we felt that the skills and expertise of the staff in this team could routinely be utilised more widely in a context where the administration as a whole is stretched.

With respect to student surveys, the students we met considered that it was difficult to access any information about the outcome of the surveys to which they contributed, or to know what changes were made as a result. Some individual staff communicated this well but centrally-organised publication of outcomes would improve the consistency of communication across College.

4.2.2. Curriculum Development, Bologna Desk, VLE

This area covers a number of related functions which occupy separate units/offices including academic practice, academic programmes and regulations, course proposals, e-learning and the Bologna Desk. Whilst the various individuals are clearly on top of their relevant

functions, they expressed difficulty in working together as a team given their distribution across offices and buildings.

A significant time was spent during discussions unravelling the programme/course approval process. This is currently an extremely long process (as identified by both the administrative staff and Directors of teaching and learning in the schools) and involves several separate offices/officers. As an example, a postgraduate course proposal would take the following pathway:

Academic interest stage – School executive – Dean of Graduate Studies (who allows development of a full proposal) – Academic programmes and Curriculum Officer (although some proposals can bypass the School) – Bologna Desk – Graduate Studies Committee – External Assessors – University Council.

Important feedback can be provided at each stage and the proposal can cycle amongst stages before progressing. The length of time it takes to approve a proposal depends on how the proposers deal with the feedback. In addition, Academic Practice oversees the learning outcomes and the e-learning Unit can also be involved. There is, however, no input of marketing expertise to course development.

There is a Director of Teaching and Learning Undergraduate and Postgraduate in each school, yet new programmes might come to the Academic Programmes Office without going through these academic officers in the school. There is clearly a lack of a team approach across the relevant areas College-wide to programme development.

Through discussions between the review team and academic officers it became evident that the role of the Directors of Teaching and Learning varies depending on whether the School is single or multi-disciplinary, and there is lack of clarity, as expressed by the Directors, as to whether their role is to lead or to manage, exacerbated by the significant overlap with Programme Coordinator roles. Some Directors confirmed a limited interaction with the OVP as such, but often strong interaction with particular individuals (e.g. in course development). As in discussions with other groups, the sense is that individual staff are great but that structures are problematic. As one individual articulated, developing a network of relationships controls whether or not a Director can deliver their role. There seems to be confusion about the relative roles of VP, SL and other academic officers.

The lack of University-wide marks and standards poses a further problem, as it seems individual schools/course committees/programmes are effectively able to implement what they wish. There is clear recognition that some changes to marks and standards will be needed, associated with the implementation of GeneSiS, but there is a reluctance to do so. There is also recognition of the huge duplication and manual administrative load pertaining under the current system.

The implementation of Bologna (modularisation) was stated to have been not well received by academics and added significant additional workload (due to changes in decisions during implementation). The implementation of Bologna has thus been problematic and the Bologna Desk is spending considerable time in raising awareness around Bologna and learning outcomes.

It would seem sensible, in the face of the current problems around curriculum development, to establish key coordinating roles at faculty level as well as integrating the various units to

overcome duplication of work and reduce time for development of new programmes. Consideration being given to orientating administrative staff within ACDU to a particular Faculty and related Schools is also recommended.

A number of other points were raised and discussed during the meetings. The e-learning and Academic Practice Unit (involved in academic staff development and support) is currently situated within the administrative structures but it was suggested that this might be attached to a relevant School or senior T&L champion. The VLE application will be out of date in 2012 but sensibly any VLE development is awaiting the completion of GeneSIS.

One final issue that needs to be raised relates to the management of student cases. During the review it became evident that a large number of individual academic officers and administrative offices were involved in handling student cases, leading to significant duplication of effort, excessive workloads for some individuals, excessive time delays in deciding on outcomes for students and a sense of confusion amongst both staff and students. It is recommended that a thorough review of the management of student cases be undertaken, leading to rationalisation of responsibility and devolution of less serious issues to the local (faculty and/or school) level.

4.3. Academic Secretariat

The role of the Academic Secretariat is primarily to support the Academic Officers (Vice Provost, Senior Lecturer, Registrar). The diversity of work was appreciated as was the positive atmosphere in which it was conducted. There was a culture which was supportive of personal development.

There was however pressure created by multiple reporting lines and a disjointedness, a 'them and us' mentality evidenced in a number of units with which the office interfaced. Some work was created by servicing the recently formed Planning Group which (the Review Team observed) had considerable overlap with the membership of the Executive Officers Group (save for the absence of the Provost himself). The work of the group was vital but the team reflected on whether there might be more efficient mechanisms for prosecuting it.

Staff development recurred as a theme and the Review Team suggested that the regular movement of administrators from Centre to Schools and vice-versa was a way of contributing to a new culture with the useful spin off of aiding the removal of the 'them and us' characteristic.

4.4. Student Administration System User Support

Whilst we did not have a specific meeting with the Student Administration System User Support team, we met with the team leader in the context of both the managers' and GeneSIS meetings and two members of the team attended the open meeting for OVP staff.

Through these discussions we found the team to be focused and engaged. They are clearly key to a successful implementation for GeneSIS and were enthusiastic about the project and positive about the change to their working practices which they anticipate will result.

It became evident in the open meeting, when staff from CAAS were also present, that SAS User Support had knowledge about current systems which was not being widely shared with users within the OVP. It seems that all staff would benefit from opportunities to develop closer working relationships and share problems and solutions, such as OVP team meetings, or perhaps a SAS user forum.

4.5. GeneSIS Project

It was evident from the Self Assessment document that GeneSIS is a high priority for the OVP, and the centrality of this project to the goals of the OVP was reinforced throughout the review visit. It is clearly a hugely ambitious project, and the review team was invited to comment specifically on the organisational capacity to deliver a successful outcome.

We met with the Project Sponsor (Academic Secretary) and the Project Team. Throughout these meetings we were impressed with the quality of the leadership, management and planning in place. The project team was happy, engaged and enthusiastic and, whilst not underestimating the challenge at hand, demonstrated a welcome self-confidence in their ability to deliver.

The review team was therefore reassured that the project is in good hands and that the approach being adopted is appropriate. We would however offer the following observations.

Firstly, it will be essential for College to facilitate the timely decision-making needed to adhere to the project timescales. Doubts about College's ability to make clear decisions and then implement them emerged as a theme of this review and to be successful GeneSIS will require the support of the committee structure and senior managers in addressing this.

Ensuring that the Academic Secretary is supported in exercising the necessary authority once decisions have been made in committee will be key to success.

Secondly, it is important for College to recognise the true size and complexity of this project. Any project of this nature will inevitably experience delays, problems, and adjustments in scope. It is important that this in itself is not seen as failure, but that the project team is supported in managing these issues when they arise through the project governance structure.

Thirdly, the project has a large number of stakeholders and we would endorse the project team's approach to communicate widely, often, and using existing institutional structures. In meeting a variety of staff and students from across College it was evident that there are very high expectations for the project and in some instances these were not consistent with our understanding of the project scope. Clarification and communication of the project deliverables will therefore be vital. The most important aspect of this will be to ensure that academic Schools understand the extent to which they might be asked to change their current academic practice (with respect to marks and standards, progression rules, degree classification calculation, modularisation etc.) as part of the project.

Finally, we perceive a central role for the COO in ensuring that the relationship between the OVP and Information Systems is productive and mutually supportive both through the period of the project and beyond. The fixed-price approach will help to manage the immediate financial risk around the project, but the on-going system maintenance and development needs will need to be supported appropriately and budgeted for. The COO will also have a role to play in ensuring that the staffing implications of the project are adequately supported by the Staff Office.

5. Recommendations

A significant number of issues and suggestions have been raised in the main body of this report. Here we have, in addition, identified a small number of major areas where we suggest that change/quality improvement is most urgently needed. Under each area we offer a menu of specific ideas for consideration. Some of these may be considered 'quick wins', others will require longer term commitment and resourcing, not all of which will be within the OVP's immediate control.

A. It is recommended that work is undertaken to clarify roles, responsibilities and reporting lines, both within the OVP and at College level.

We suggest that:

- Each area of functional responsibility (and each individual within each area) should have clear line management and reporting relationships. Dual reporting and 'dotted line' arrangements should be avoided where possible. Where these are currently a proxy for stakeholder or customer relationships, these should be clearly understood. Accountability should be aligned with Authority. (See 2.3, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.5, 3.1.7).
- College should focus on ensuring that decisions are made in a timely way and then enforced. Schools and departments should not be in a position to exercise discretion in the implementation of College Policy decisions made through due process. (See 2.4, 3.1.3, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.1.8)
- Attention should be given to aligning operational priorities to strategic planning through the line management structure to ensure proper realisation of strategic goals. (See 2.7, 3.1.4, 4.1.4)

B. It is recommended that there be a focus on communication and relationship building between the OVP and Academic Schools and Departments.

We suggest that:

- The OVP should consider developing faculty-facing structures which establish specific individuals as clear points of contact for Schools. Those individuals should be expected to establish close and effective working relationships with 'their' faculties or Schools, providing guidance and support across a range of areas which might include (for example) curriculum development, modularisation, learning outcomes and quality reviews. A further embedding of the existing structure should enable this to happen without the need for radical restructuring. (See 2.5, 3.3.4, 4.2.1, 4.2.2)
- Building on and in addition to the plans included in the GeneSIS project, a Staff development programme should be developed, focusing initially on change management, team building, and customer service. (See 3.4)

C. It is recommended that focused consideration is given to the way in which the OVP could improve its support for the Student Experience.

We suggest that:

- Access to student-facing areas of the OVP should be improved. Currently services are fragmented and students experience frustration from being 'bounced from pillar to post'. We therefore endorse the proposal to develop a 'One Stop Shop' approach, and recommend that College identifies appropriate space for this. This would have

- Those staff who engage in face to face contact with students should be supported with customer service training, and the development of clear escalation procedures for issues which they are unable to manage directly. (See 3.4.4, 4.1.5)
 - A Student Complaints procedure is developed. There is no such procedure in place at present and this needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. (See 3.4.4, 4.1.5)
 - The feedback obtained from student surveys should be published, as should a statement of the action taken in response. (4.2.1)
 - The process for management of student cases should be reviewed. Responsibility for the process needs to be clarified, and the process itself needs to be streamlined to deliver more timely outcomes for students. Consideration should be given to devolving responsibility for some types of case to Schools. (See 4.2.2)
- D. **We recommend that communication is undertaken to ensure that the expectations of the GeneSIS project are realistic, and that the project deliverables are clearly understood.** (See 4.5)

Ms Carolyn Fowler, Registrar and Secretary, Durham University

Mr Jon Baldwin, Registrar, University of Warwick

Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University College Cork

July 2011

SECTION C

Response from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer and the Academic Secretary

We welcome the helpful comments made in the review and we also, in general, accept the suggestions made for improvement, some of which require collaboration with Schools and Course Offices and action at College level since academic administration, policy development and implementation extend beyond the remit of the OVP.

Staff

We are pleased that the reviewers found that the staff of the OVP, “without exception, demonstrated a high level of commitment to and pride in the College.” Staff development and career progression featured as important issues for interviewees. There are several staff development programmes available to all staff and many staff members in the OVP are supported to pursue further study. The emphasis on change management, however, is valid and this is an integral feature of the GeneSIS training programme. The reorganisation of the administrative functions in the OVP has led to changes in reporting lines for some staff. Team building workshops would be very beneficial in helping staff adapt to the new environment and would contribute to improving services generally.

Administrative staff members in College are eligible to apply for administrative/support positions in any area in College, and normally career progression is not confined to one area. The implementation of GeneSIS will create opportunities for administrative staff to develop new skills, and to take on new roles that will emerge as a result of different administrative processes and systems. The engagement of OVP staff, and College staff in general, with the GeneSIS project is commendable, and the reviewers comment that there is “a clear expectation amongst staff that there would be further change, and a willingness to engage with this.”

The reviewers remark that students indicated that the “OVP does not always meet the high standards of customer service” and recommend that a ‘Student Complaints’ procedure be developed. This is a worthwhile and practical recommendation which will be acted on as a matter of priority.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Leadership

It would be fair to say that there has been confusion of roles and responsibilities in respect of academic administration and the implementation of policy decisions. This is in part due to the significant number of changes in the past five years in academic governance and roles and responsibilities of annual officers; the creation of directors of teaching and learning at School level; the establishment of the OVP, and the reorganisation of functions within the OVP (formerly the Senior Lecturer’s Office).

This coming year should see a change in this situation as the new structures become more embedded and a better distribution and alignment of functions are achieved across the roles of Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, Senior Lecturer, Dean of Graduate Studies, Registrar, and the new officership of Vice-Provost for Global Relations. It should be noted, however, that there will always be a degree of complexity in the management of academic administration and policy implementation.

The preparation for the implementation of GeneSIS has identified a range of process changes and these will shape the overall organisation of the OVP and academic administration generally. We found that there is confusion among College staff and students as to the function of the OVP. Some

practical steps might be defining the Senior Lecturer role as 'Dean of Undergraduate Studies', and establishing the 'Academic Registry.'

The reviewers commented on the 'complexity' of reporting lines. In general we agree that there is an unnecessary degree of complexity and feel that a redrawing of reporting lines should be considered.

Organisational Areas

As part of the GeneSIS project, the Project Team identified a range of areas where there is considerable duplication, manual record keeping, and work-around efforts to manage, in the absence of fit-for-purpose information systems, the growing complexity of academic administration across College. The reviewers' observations confirm that individual offices within the OVP are struggling to provide an adequate service to the different stakeholders, and in some instances there are insufficient resources to meet growing demands.

The future positioning of the Student Recruitment function, aspects of the International Office, and the Trinity Access Programme must be considered as part of the change reform necessitated by the implementation of a new student information system and any wider administrative and support services reform.

GeneSIS and Space

The reviewers remarked that they were 'reassured that the project is in good hands and the approach being adopted is appropriate.' The management of expectations is critical, and the continued support from the Executive Officers and the entire community is necessary if the project is to be successfully delivered within the proposed timeline and budget.

The recommendation with regards to space is not new. The review of the OVP (then the Senior Lecturer's Office) conducted in June 1999 identified the need for contiguous space and recommended 'a one-stop-shop' approach for central academic administration. Apart from relocating the undergraduate Admissions staff to Houses 4 and 5, there has been no development in this regard.

While acknowledging space and financial constraints generally, securing space for an 'Academic Registry' is a minimum requirement and should be prioritized.

WISER (Centre for Women in Science and Engineering Research)

As staff in WISER were not available to meet the reviewers, the reviewers were asked to comment on the positioning of WISER within the OVP (there has been some discussion about where WISER should be located within College). In response to this request, the reviewers commented through email correspondence to the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer as follows:

"Units like this quite often end up located alongside the academic registry, as there is rarely an obvious home for them and the culture of academic administration tends to support structured engagement with academic colleagues. What's important is that they have access to a senior line manager who can offer support and guidance where necessary, and that they are well networked into the institution. If that is the case for WISER then there is no reason it should not flourish within the OVP. If you are seeking an alternative, one such might be found within a HR / staff development function, but we have little information about your Staff Office and this may not be appropriate in your case."

Review Report Recommendations

The reviewers make four primary and several secondary recommendations; some of which can be implemented without delay, while others will require input from the Executive Officers, Annual Officers, Schools and other administrative and support areas.

The recommendations will be considered in detail with the relevant stakeholders and an implementation plan will follow to the Council and Board in Michaelmas Term, 2011.

Professor Linda Hogan
Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer

Patricia Callaghan
Academic Secretary