



University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

UCD Finance Office

December 2022

1. Introduction

The Review Group presented the findings of its report on the UCD Finance Office in December 2021 following the quality review which was undertaken on the 4th October to 8th October 2021.

The Review Group Report together with the initial responses from the Finance Office to the main recommendations were issued to all finance staff in March 2022.

The process of preparing the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) commenced with a meeting between the UCD Quality Office, the Bursar and the Chair of the Finance QIP Committee on the 15th March 2022 and the QIP Committee was established a week later.

The membership of the QIP Committee was as follows:

Donal Doolan, Senior Administrator 2, Chair
Richael Leahy, Senior Administrator 2
Eamonn O' Neill, Senior Administrator 2
Sarah O' Flaherty, Senior Administrator 3
Siobhan Dunne, Senior Administrator 4
Stephen Manuel, Senior Administrator 4

The QIP Committee drafted responses to each of the recommendations during the Summer of 2022 and these were subsequently agreed with the Bursar.

A meeting was held with all staff to present and discuss the QIP responses, the document was circulated in advance of the meeting to ensure that staff have adequate time to consider and comment on the document. Feedback received was incorporated into the responses.

Following feedback meetings with the Quality Office and representatives of QIP Committee the final QIP was resubmitted to the Quality Office in December 2022.

Categories

1. Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit
2. Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit
3. Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Timescale

- A. Recommendation already implemented
- B. Recommendations to be implemented within one year
- C. Recommendations to be implemented within five years
- D. Recommendations which will not be implemented

Report	RG Recommendation	Category (see list above)	Action Taken/Action Planned/Reason for Not Implementing	Timescale (see list above)
Planning, Management, Organisation and Resources				
2.9	A review of the strategic and financial planning process, including the budgeting model and the investment prioritisation process and pipeline, should be undertaken to ensure that processes are fit for purpose, transparent and support the delivery of the University's objectives.	2	<p>The Finance Office will prepare and present different financial operational models and scenarios to the Acting President and seek his view on how they would like to use financial drivers to direct the University strategy (Q2 2023).</p> <p>The Finance Office will close out the 2022 planning process by reviewing with key participants in order to apply learnings to the 2023 process.</p>	C
2.10	In relation to strategic and financial planning, the roles of the UMT and the Heads of Colleges should be reviewed and clarified.	2	<p>The President with the support of the UMT sets the strategic objectives for the University which are supported by the budgeting and financial planning processes.</p> <p>The pending appointment of a new President will present an opportunity for the University to review the roles of the UMT and the Heads of Colleges.</p> <p>The Finance Office will play a full role in the review, led by the President, and in advising on emergent proposals.</p>	C

2.11	The RG recommends that the FRAMC ensures that the financial plans are considered in the context of the University's performance and strategy.	2	The Finance Office will put forward suggestions to the Chair of the FRAMC on what additional information or presentations could be provided to assist FRAMC in their annual deliberations.(Q2 2023)	B
2.12	Responsibility, including reporting lines, for the Strategic Planning, Risk Management and Institutional Research team should be clarified with allocated resourcing of a dedicated budget and appropriate capability put in place.	3	<p>The President and the Bursar will lead a review of the objective outlined in this recommendation in consultation with the staff of the teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The President will be asked if they wish to review reporting lines. (Q1 2023) ● Review of the role and responsibility of the Strategic Planning, Risk Management and Institutional Research team, having regard to possible changes that may be necessary if recommendations in a recent KPMG report on UCD's Risk Management is to be implemented. (Q2 2023) ● Review of the resource allocation will be reassessed. (Q3 2023 and annually thereafter in line with the budget timetable). 	B
2.13	Consideration should be given on how best to support the Finance Planning and Management Accounting (FPMA) team to fully integrate all members of the team and the FPMA team into the broader Finance team. This will help to balance the local needs of each college with central university planning.	1	As stated in the Self-Assessment Report, the Financial Planning and Management Accounting unit (led by the Director of Financial Planning and Management Accounting) was established in 2018 when the College Finance Managers and Directors became part of the Finance Office. Previously, their direct reporting line was to the College Principals or Vice-Presidents.	B

		<p>At the start of September 2022 the Director of FPMA was tasked with overseeing the Finance Office transformation project and is full-time on this project. A replacement post recruited as an additional Director of FPMA, with responsibility for the role excluding Finance Transformation. In conjunction with developing the HR Plan, this offers an opportunity to review the roles, assignments and to identify steps to improve integration with the broader Finance Office.</p> <p>FPMA meetings will move to face to face meetings every three weeks and these meetings will have a formal agenda and action points to ensure the meetings are useful and that all attendees will have sight of the outcomes. Each team member will have monthly a one to one meeting with their line manager. (This will commence in Q1 2023). These meetings will focus on specific areas of concern for each FPMA team member and their college area.</p> <p>Working groups will be set up to deal with specific areas of interest/concern such as research areas, externally funded initiatives such as Human Capital Initiatives. This should result in a more streamlined information process with the team members experienced in the area influencing the outcomes and communicating the outcomes to the wider FPMA group. Q1 2023</p> <p>The group will also engage in specific team training in areas such as Tableau reports and Planning Budgeting Cloud Service (PBCS)(Q1 2023).</p> <p>A review of the reports available for the team will be undertaken to ensure information is readily available, streamlined and useful (Q1 2023).</p>	
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2.14	Formalised, structured central meetings and the use of agreed centralised KPIs or other agreed performance indicators would also help to strengthen decision-making.	1	<p>The Finance Office will review communication practices and will agree on meeting norms within teams, at management level, and as a unit. This will include a fortnightly meeting of Senior UCD Finance Staff for each area (Financial Management, Financial Planning, Procurement and Strategic Planning & Risk Management, chaired by the Bursar. The meeting will commence in Q1 2023.</p> <p>Objectives for each unit will be set and KPIs established to report output. In most cases, these KPIs will reflect what we believe to be high levels of service already in place. Agreed objective and KPI for each team will be delivered by the end of Q1 2023.</p>	B
2.15	Risk management should be incorporated into the Finance unit's planning and budgeting with the risk register to be used as a management tool to highlight key risks facing the Unit and, where appropriate, the University.	1	<p>The Finance Office risk register is updated and presented to the Audit and Risk Management Committee annually (last presented in January 2022).</p> <p>The updated risk register reflects all existing as well as new key significant risks, particularly those relating to the University's capital expenditure programme, income streams, recurrent cost base and key risks relating to the failure of financial systems to adequately support the business and development of the University.</p> <p>The Audit and Risk Management Committee is satisfied that the Finance Office has identified and is managing all significant risks that could adversely impact on budgeting and financial planning.</p> <p>The risk register will be reviewed quarterly by the Bursar, Director of Financial Planning and Director of Financial</p>	B

			Planning and Management Accounting and will be updated as required but annually at a minimum.	
Core Activities, Functions and Processes				
<i>Note: Starting in January 2023, the Finance Office will be engaging in the 'FinPOST' preparation project as approved by the UMT-Service Group. This will take approximately six months and may influence the timings below for 3.15, 3.16 & 3.17</i>				
3.14	In the context of the Digital Transformation strand of the University Strategy 2020-2024, and the outputs of the Uniforum benchmarking exercise, the RG recommends the development of a clear IT strategy for Finance to provide more robust systems that leave it less exposed to manual tasks and work-arounds and improve the user experience. The introduction of an online expense claims system and improved integration of existing systems to produce consolidated accounts must be prioritised. IT systems must be raised as a key risk on the Unit's Risk Register and monitored closely until such time as the risk levels are reduced to an acceptable level.	3	<p>The Director of Financial Planning has been seconded to focus on Finance Transformation. A proposal for replacement of the full set of finance systems will be brought to the UMT-Service Group in Oct 2022. The proposal will be for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Initiation, Market Testing, Development of a Target Operating Model and Procurement of Systems and a System Integrator by March 2023. • Approval to proceed to implementation April 2023. • Design and Build by December 2023 • Go Live April 2024 <p>The Finance Office will prioritise the implementation in 2022 of Employee Self Service for Expenses as a first wave Transformation. As of June 2022, the UMT Service Group has indicated support for this and a Business Proposal is due to be brought to the Service Group in July 2022.</p> <p>The Director of Financial Management has initiated a project to document all standard operating procedures including, the production of the consolidated financial statements, payroll, general ledger, capital expenditure, and commercial activities. This project is expected to be completed by the end of August 2022 and will reduce the</p>	C

			<p>reliance on key staff members.</p> <p>The new finance system will take a number of years to implement. In the meantime we are embarking on a number of interim measures which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expenses self-service ● a new procurement system and buying system, ● an accommodation booking and management (beds) system ● a review and improvement of finance services to our Principal Investigator community. <p>These are all expected to be completed in the next year (2023).</p> <p>A Finance Systems Risk Sub-Register has been prepared and presented to the June 2022 Audit & Risk Management Committee meeting. This Sub-Register will be reviewed quarterly by Finance Office Senior Management and will be updated annually and presented to the ARMC.</p>	
3.15	<p>Work together on a new shared mission and vision for the Finance Office reflecting all areas within the Unit. The Unit would benefit from a collective meeting to consider the current mission and vision and whether it still reflects the shared mission and vision of the UCD Finance Office and if not, what needs to change. This opportunity should also be used to discuss the collective challenges the Finance Office faces and how the teams within the Unit can support each other better to live this new vision.</p>	1	<p>A collective meeting of UCD Finance Office will be held in Q2 2023 to reflect on the current vision and mission and establish what changes may be required to ensure that the vision and mission is shared by all units under the umbrella of UCD Finance.</p> <p>The proposed replacement of the finance systems provides a further opportunity to evaluate the challenges faced by the Finance Office and identify the systems and “people” solutions to meet these challenges.</p> <p>The key driver of selecting a new finance system will be to determine how the organisation wants its finance services</p>	C

			<p>delivered. We will explore externally how other organisations operate and bring some options back to the finance team, its customers and the UMT to determine how we should operate going forward. This is a key piece of work that has to be done before we select a system.</p> <p>The results of the external exploration and internal consultation will be fed back to the UCD Finance staff to allow for a secondary consultation leading to a 'To Be' mission and vision that will define the Finance Office to be delivered by the Transformation Programme (Q3 2023).</p>	
3.16	The Units within UCD Finance Office should be appropriately resourced with allocated budgets.	3	<p>The Finance Office recognises the need for adequate staffing resources to enable it to meet its strategic objectives.</p> <p>A resourcing plan for each team will be developed and agreed upon as part of the University annual planning cycle (Q2 2023),</p>	B
3.17	Following on from the above, UCD Finance Office should develop a clear HR plan for each of the four functions within the Unit. The RG recommend that each function develop its own HR resourcing plan, including staff development, that outlines the drivers of workload and therefore how many staff are needed; appropriate EDI aspirations and how these will be met; approaches to recruitment both internally and externally. This should include a wellbeing survey for all staff.	1	<p>We are engaging with our HR Partner to address this recommendation and we are conscious of the need to provide adequate staffing resources for a number of units within the Finance Office and to reduce over-reliance on key staff members. As outlined in 3.16 a resourcing plan will be developed by each team as part of the planning cycle.</p> <p>HR Plan principles and objectives will be set for the Finance Office as a whole . This will draw on the experience of other units in UCD and also external references and will also include appropriate EDI aspirations.</p> <p>Each unit in the Finance Office will then translate the common objectives and principles into an HR Plan for their</p>	B

			<p>unit (Q3 2023).</p> <p>As recommended by the RG, we will conduct a staff wellbeing survey for all Finance staff (Q2 2023) the results of which will be assessed by the Senior Management Team. We will then engage with the teams on the path forward on any areas to be addressed.</p>	
User Perspective				
4.10	<p>Plot the Finance User Journey: Develop a plan to improve the user focus of the UCD Finance Office. This will include plotting the Finance User Journey through a comprehensive and structured process mapping exercise that will help UCD Finance Office better understand the user experience. Such a “360” approach would further contextualise the considerable ‘pain points’ that were identified by users. The mapping process requires a revised definition of who the users are as distinct from the stakeholders (including internal and external stakeholders). Further benefits will be derived from ongoing monitoring of the user experience.</p>	1	<p>The Finance Office believes that the best way to address this recommendation is via full participation in the Programme for Operations and Service Transformation (UCDPOST). The terms of reference for UCDPOST include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● development and implementation of a programme for the transformation of the operational services and process that support the academic, student and staff communities ● Establish and direct Service Focus Segment led by a Service Focus Lead to drive transformation, and provide a unified service experience for users <p>The Finance Office will actively assist and support the work of the UMT Service Group in delivering UCDPOST. Working with the Programme, the Finance Office will plan a migration of services to the Service Focus Segments (Teaching, Researching, Campus Living, Enabling Services).</p> <p>As outlined in 3.14 the Director of FPMA has been tasked with responsibility for replacing our finance systems as part of UCDPOST and is a member of the UMT Service Group who will oversee the implementation of UCDPOST.</p>	C

			<p>Process mapping of the 'As Is' and 'To Be' environments will be carried out Q1 2023 and the 'To Be' environment will be incorporated into the Target Operating Model.</p> <p>The Target Operating Model will be approved by the UMT-Service Group in April 2023. (See Timeline in 3.14).</p>	
4.11	<p>The RG also recommends a user-led review of post-award research supports to include input from the office of the Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Impact and UCD HR. Consideration should be given to the need for clearer signposting to available resources and personnel for research end users, the provision of training for early career researchers, the provision of real time info on Infohub, an effective alerts system for grant under and overspends, clearly documented processes for the end of grant phase of research funding.</p>	1/2research	<p>As part of the UCDPOST project UCD Finance will engage in user led review of research supports both pre and post award.</p> <p>A cross functional project is also being undertaken to identify systemic reasons for grant underspends and it is expected that a report with the findings of the group and recommendations for services improvement will be presented in Q1 2023.</p> <p>While generally the Research Finance Office can service the reporting requirements of the research agencies quite well, (as borne out by the responses to the QA questionnaire to the Irish-based agencies) and can meet audit and regulatory compliance requirements, it does struggle to meet the requirements of the University research community.</p> <p>As of June 2022, the Research Finance Office has been restructured separating the operational and technical support into distinct areas. A new senior manager has been recruited and will manage the operational responsibilities including workflow processes in the unit to ensure that service levels, information needs, and response times are improved. As outlined in 2.14 KPI and</p>	C

			<p>objective will be set in Q1 2023 and performance against these will be actively reported on for Q2 2023.</p> <p>The technical support area will provide technical advice and training to the research community with a particular focus on training for early career researchers and research accessing new sources of funding, documentation of processes, and grant account closures. Delivery of training courses will commence in Q1 2023 and will be delivered every 3 months thereafter.</p> <p>Finance has developed a report that identifies underspending research accounts to ensure that applications can be made to research agencies in a timely manner for no cost time extensions to research contracts. (See also 4.12 below)</p>	
4.12	<p>Service Design and Systems: Using the mapping process, identify opportunities to digitise services for the user, including introducing online self-service elements and user-friendly finance tools that allow users access their specific financial information. This will reduce demand for individual user requests on the Finance team members and help address the tension between the commitment to provide excellent customer service by the UCD Finance Office and the inability of the system to accommodate the desired service standards. As highlighted and considered in the SAR the UCD Finance Office should investigate options such as including functional organisation charts on the Finance Office webpage to incorporating virtual helpdesk functions e.g. MyLiveChat with prewritten responses to facilitate a self-help process. The integration of existing systems must also be considered in the context of Digital Transformation to help improve the user experience. For example it is important that the PBCS (Planning and Budgeting Cloud Services) budgeting system, Tableau and Infohub be integrated for reporting purposes.</p>	1	<p>As stated above, we believe our plan to replace our systems and to transform should be very closely integrated with UCDPOST and the University's digital platform. This will be the focus for much work in the coming year and generally initiatives will be paused where it is likely that they will come within the scope of the platform/new finance system/POST.</p> <p>Nevertheless, as of June 202 and noted in 3.14 above, we are in the process of procuring/implementing system enhancements or new systems in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● a contract management system for the procurement unit; ● e-marketplace to enhance requisitioning and buying; ● Implementation of Self Service Expenses; ● Upgrade of eFinancials including provision of Single Sign On; 	C

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Led by Estates) a new accommodation booking and management (bed management) system for student residences; ● (Led by UCD Research) implementation of a new Research Management System. <p>The Research Finance Office is working with UCD Research to identify areas for better integration of services including use of Connectors and better integration of the Finance Office website with the Research Portal. Where appropriate, enhancements will be applied.</p> <p>As part of the implementation phase of Finance Transformation [FY23/24], the Platform solution will be used to implement Service Management, Knowledge Management and Digital Agent technology to digitise services for the user and to enable self-service. The website will also be redesigned to integrate and support this technology.</p> <p>User reporting is fully within the scope of Finance Transformation and the reporting will be delivered in an integrated manner, consistent with the university's Enterprise architecture [FY23/24].</p>	
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3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section should only contain a list, prioritised by the Quality Improvement Committee, of recommendations outlined in the Review Group Report, which require additional resources. The planned action to address each recommendation with an estimate of the cost involved should also be included:

1. 3.14 Finance System Replacement - the cost associated with the replacement of the finance system has yet to be fully determined but is expected to be significant.
2. 3.16 Units appropriately resourced - once work on resourcing plans are completed a full costing will be prepared. This will be completed by Q2 2023.
3. 2.12 Strategic Planning & Risk Management and Institutional Research to be appropriately resourced - costs to be estimated in Q2 2023 when resource requirements are determined.

Note: The Quality Improvement Plan should be used to inform School/Support Unit and College level academic, support service and resource planning activities.