

Peer Review Panel Report



Information Technology Services

21st October 2008

Introduction

As part of ITB's commitment to quality assurance it is the policy of the Institute to review key academic and other services on a periodic basis. A schedule to review the facilities and services involved in the delivery of academic programmes has been published within ITB policy document 2MP16¹.

Service reviews

Service reviews include three phases, an internal self evaluation phase leading to a self-evaluation report, an external evaluation phase leading to a final evaluation report and a period of change implementation leading to a final follow-up report to the Top Management Group.

Internal self evaluation

The emphasis of a critical self-evaluation of facilities or services provided should be on reflection, analysis and improvement.

The primary objective of self-evaluation is to answer four key questions:

➤ **What are you trying to do?**

This refers to the mission, aims and objectives, their appropriateness, and how the section positions itself locally, nationally and internationally.

➤ **How are you trying to do it?**

This addresses process, procedure and practice in place and requires an analysis of their effectiveness.

➤ **How do you know it works?**

This looks at feedback systems in place in particular for quality monitoring and quality management.

➤ **How do you change in order to improve?**

This examines issues of strategic planning and quality improvement as well as capacity and willingness to change.

¹ 2MP16 Evaluation of facilities and services involved in the delivery of academic programmes

The IT department has recently completed an internal self evaluation and submitted a self evaluation report on the information technology services it provides within the Institute.

The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the peer review panel established to evaluate the quality of IT services provided within the Institute against the criteria for the evaluation of facilities and services involved in the delivery of academic programmes as outlined in policy document 2MP16.

Departmental overview

The IT department was amongst the first sections to be established upon the formation of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown in December 1999. During this start up period, a consultant and three technicians were employed by Institute management to plan and design the fledgling campus's information technology infrastructure. As a direct consequence of these initial activities, the support department have functional responsibility for delivering the following services:

1. Computer hardware

- Procurement of personal computers, laptops, servers, disk arrays, security save hardware and media, printers, IT consumables and peripheral devices in accordance with Institute policy and government regulations.
- The on-going management and maintenance of the above.
- To develop an appropriate IT strategy document to outline future development and hardware requirements.
- To maintain and publish a hardware asset register.
- To dispose of the above equipment in accordance with corporate governance.
- To plan the development of the IT infrastructure.

2. Computer software

- Procurement of software in accordance with Institute policy and government regulations.
- To develop an appropriate IT strategy document to outline future development software requirements.
- To ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to manage software licenses.

- To develop and maintain in-house systems, including the Institutes World Wide Web presence and Intranet facilities.
- To ensure the compliance, compatibility and inter-operability of all new and proposed systems whether application or data driven.

3. Technical support

- To provide 'user' technical support to students and staff.
- To support all IT related administrative and educational activities
- To provide a helpdesk facility.
- To provide assistance to campus companies when possible.
- To maintain all IT equipment and services procured through the department.

4. Electronics / engineering laboratory support

- To support all engineering / electronics laboratory activities.
- To maintain all engineering / electronics equipment.
- To procure class materials and services in accordance with Institute procurement policies and procedures.
- To assist management and staff maintain a safe and secure environment.
- To assist staff and students engaged in project work.
- To manage the Institutes engineering / electronics laboratories.

5. MIS services

- To plan Information Technology strategy in line with the Institutes strategic plan.
- To liaise with external Management Information Services providers and associated service providers (An Chéim)

6. Local area network

- To provide a stable reliable network infrastructure.
- Negotiate maintenance contracts with suppliers.
- To plan and develop network facilities.

7. Wide area network

- To manage all wide area networks and associated equipment.
- Negotiate maintenance contracts with suppliers.
- To plan and develop network facilities.
- Negotiate diverse and resilient backup links whenever possible.

8. Audio-visual services

- To maintain and manage all audio-visual services.
- To plan and develop future services.

9. Security (information technology)

- To manage the security, integrity and accessibility of Information Technology services.
- To carry out an annual network and user security audit.
- To configure appropriate 'live' security services.
- To manage security events in accordance with ITB policy documents. (Acceptable User Policy, Exit Policy etc.)
- To configure an appropriate security save schedule in accordance with published policy document.
- To plan, test and implement an Information Technology disaster recovery plan.

10. Telephony

- To maintain and manage all desktop telephone services.
- To maintain and manage all mobile phone services.
- To keep abreast of technology developments and develop the infrastructure accordingly.

11. Photocopying services.

- To maintain and manage all photocopy services.

12. Training

- To train and provide guidance to users in relation to new facilities and services.

In the intervening years as the campus has developed and grown, so too have department staffing levels.

The work areas and staff within the IT department now comprise as follows:

Computer support

Senior Technical Officer Tim O'Sullivan

Technical Officers:	Sandra McCullagh	Raymond Andrews
	Stephen White	Amanda Clancy
	Gerome Donnelly	Eamonn O'Brien

Electronic / engineering support

Senior Technical Officer: Tom Egan

Technical Officers:	Derek Bevan	Vacancy
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All staff in the department report to the IT Manager, Dave Curran.

Panel members

Chairperson	Colm Hennessy IT Manager, IADT
Secretary	Diarmuid O'Callaghan PhD Registrar, IT Blanchardstown
Staff representative	Orla McMahon Dept of Informatics, IT Blanchardstown
Student representative	Bryan Geraghty Students' Union, IT Blanchardstown
In attendance	Michael Keane Quality Assurance Officer, IT Blanchardstown
Date of Panel Meeting	Tuesday 21 st October 2008

IT staff present

IT Manager

Dave Curran

Senior Technical Officers

Tim O'Sullivan

Tom Egan

Technical Officers

Raymond Andrews

Derek Bevan

Gerome Donnelly

Sandra McCullagh

Eamonn O'Brien

Stephen White

Panel findings

In evaluating the quality and operation of this service the following have been considered and are hereby reported upon:

Self evaluation report

A detailed discussion with the IT staff present informed the panel of how the internal self evaluation and resulting report had been completed. The panel acknowledged the honesty, comprehensive content and quality of the self evaluation report.

Stakeholder feedback

Feedback on the quality of service provided was acquired through the use of an online questionnaire.

Main issues identified from feedback included the following:

➤ **Printers**

Issues were raised with regard to the replenishing of printing supplies.

➤ **Hardware**

Issues were raised with regard to the age/performance/availability of personal computers

➤ **Helpdesk**

Issues were raised with regard to the availability of technical officers, helpdesk opening times and feedback with regard to helpdesk tickets raised.

Response from IT to stakeholder feedback

Response to issues identified in the stakeholder feedback was sought by the panel. The following summarises the discussions.

Printers

The panel were informed as to how steps have been taken to secure the printer paper trays to reduce paper wastage and theft and how the IT Manager has engaged with human resources and finance to investigate the possibility of appointing a student to monitor/replenish printing supplies within the various laboratories throughout the campus. The panel recommended that printing issues be prioritised and resolved as a matter of urgency.

The suggestion of a central print facility was put forward by the panel but counter-argued by the IT department on the grounds that it would be seen as a degradation of the service provided to students, cause problems when timetabling as some academics required a local printer in class and would require a more detailed and time consuming student induction.

Hardware

IT staff elaborated on this issue in detail and referred to the Annual Asset Replacement Report presented to senior management on an annual basis. The panel heard how a strategic decision had been taken by the management of the Institute as to the allocation of funding for asset replacement over the last few years. The panel recommended that an IT Equipment Replacement Policy be drafted for more details please see the panel recommendation section of this document.

Helpdesk

With regard to the availability of IT support staff the panel heard how the recent appointment of two Senior Technical Officers would eliminate any staffing issues in the unforeseen absence of the IT Manager and lead to an overall increase in the level of service provided. The panel also heard how a failure had been identified in the helpdesk software with regard to the tracking of incomplete helpdesk tickets and that a replacement was currently under investigation. The panel recommended that any replacement software be tested to ensure that it can effectively address the shortcomings/failings of the existing Helpdesk software. A review of the Helpdesk opening times was suggested by the panel, which was positively received by the IT staff present but will require further consultation and consensus between the key stakeholders.

Online questionnaire

The panel were informed that both the decision to use and the content of the questionnaire was determined internally within the IT team. In the light of continuous improvement the panel were of the opinion that for future reviews the following would be considered:

- Involving external parties / key stakeholders outside of the department in the design/content of the questionnaire
- Employing additional mechanisms to promote increased stakeholder feedback including the use of focus groups and meetings with key stakeholders.
- Piloting the questionnaire on a sample test group of stakeholders prior to the commencement of the survey.
- Provide incentives to increase survey engagement.

Stakeholder expectations

Consensus was reached that a common understanding of expectations did not currently exist and that this needed to be addressed. The panel believed that the expectations of students and academic staff could be re-balanced with IT taking a more proactive approach in advising these parties of the service it provides by making more use of the Intranet and possibly by also having one of the Senior Technical Officers attend course boards. It was also accepted that the global audience had not been sufficiently informed as to the capabilities/limitations of the IT department and that a more outward and engaging approach by IT would help to resolve this. The panel recommended that the induction process for staff and students be reviewed to include more detailed information on service provision and the boundary to expectations of service provided, see recommendations for further details.

Planning and prioritisation of work

The panel heard how the IT department planned and prioritised their work, guided by the Institute's Strategic Plan¹, team development plan and personal development plans within budget constraints. The mechanism of agreeing priority of work with departmental heads was identified as a critical issue which may need to be addressed.

¹ Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011

Quality assurance

The panel were informed of how the internal self evaluation and resulting report had been completed whilst complying with the Institute's quality assurance policies and procedures. The panel concurred that said policies and procedures had been applied to the review of this service.

Panel recommendations

In the light of continuous improvement the panel offered the following recommendations for consideration:

1. Develop an IT equipment replacement policy to accommodate laboratory equipment, staff personal computers and infrastructure.
2. Set up an Institute IT strategy group made up of key stakeholders including a representative of TMG¹, the IT Manager, staff and student representatives to agree and formalise policy with regard to long term developments.
3. Produce a yearly calendar or roadmap for the IT Department highlighting key dates, projects, key stakeholders, critical input and deliverables.
4. Review the Helpdesk opening hours and/or manning levels for the first four weeks of the academic year.
5. Establish an Institute IT operations group to address local operational and communication issues. Suggested membership would include the IT Manager, a Senior Technical Officer, a representative from each functional/academic department and two student representatives.
6. Review the effectiveness of student induction to ICT services within ITB.
7. Consider producing a planning cycle guide for medium to large projects involving stakeholders to highlight the necessary steps from initial seed of thought to consultation, project delivery and post implementation review.

¹Top Management Group – senior management team in ITB

8. Establish a planning process allowing the IT Manager and Senior Technical Officers to engage with the Heads of the academic departments to assist in identifying new resource requirements.
9. Utilise focus groups in determining appropriate service levels and functional requirements with regard to helpdesk operations, printing facilities etc.
10. Provide an essential information booklet for both new staff and all students available both in hard copy format and on the intranet outlining both service provision and boundary to expectations of service provided.
11. Prioritise issues raised in the stakeholder feedback with regard to printing facilities and address as a matter of urgency.
12. Distil operational practices identified as requiring initiation/amendment in the stakeholder feedback and implement solutions as appropriate for instance a mechanism to allow students to identify the availability of computer laboratories outside of scheduled hours.
13. Clarify with the heads of the academic schools the engagement of Senior Technical Officers and their defined role within course boards
14. Consider the following:
 - The scale of cross training within the team to identify ways of adding value to the entire team from individual training experiences.
 - The development of a system for stock control with an advance ordering facility for high volume disposable items.
 - The operational effectiveness of the password changing console.
 - The provision of training for departmental managers with regard to running focus groups.
 - The effectiveness from the users perspective of wireless access to Eduroam.

Panel observations

The panel recognised the dedication, diligence and high levels of service provision given by the members of the IT department in their quest to keep pace with the ever changing technologies and requirements of the Institute and it's increasing staff and student population. Samples taken from the online assessment questionnaire referred to the professionalism and willingness of staff to "go that extra mile" illustrating the high regard that both staff and students have for the members of the IT department. The panel acknowledge the honesty, comprehensive content and quality of the self evaluation report and feel that it will serve as a useful reference tool in their endeavours to further improve the quality of the service that they provide. In conclusion the panel found the members of the IT department to be technically proficient, take pride in their work, are customer focussed, and willing to embrace the challenges that lay ahead.

Panel signatures

Chairperson

Mr. Colm Hennessy _____ Date _____

Secretary

Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan _____ Date _____