

National College of Ireland

Quality Assurance



Library Service Quality Review

Report of the Peer Review Group

March 2012

1	Introduction.....	3
1.1	Findings .....	3
2	Library & Information Service .....	4
2.1	Mission and Vision Statement of NCI Library: .....	5
2.2	Purpose of quality review of services at National College of Ireland :- .....	5
2.3	Terms of reference .....	5
2.3.1	Specific areas under review .....	6
2.4	Review Process Undertaken by the Library & Information Service .....	6
3	Findings in Relation to the Terms of Reference .....	7
3.1	Strategic Direction and Alignment with Strategic Objectives of the College .	7
3.2	Organisation & Management of the Function .....	8
3.3	<b>Functions’ services to internal/external stakeholders</b> as appropriate .....	9
3.4	The use of evidence to support decision making .....	9
3.5	Cross College engagement and communication.....	9
3.6	How the function supports compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) .....	10
4	Conclusion.....	10
5	Appendix 1: Agenda & Participants .....	11

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## 1 Introduction

This is the report of the Peer Review Group appointed by National College of Ireland (NCI) which carried out a review its Library & Information Services in March 2012

**National College of Ireland's quality system is reflective of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance (ENQA 2009).** In order to support the academic activities of the College each of the administrative and support functions must also engage in systematic evaluation of its services and operations. This is an internal quality assurance process and must be completed by each function once every five years or as directed by Academic Council and/or Executive Board.

The panel members were

- **Ms. Lorna O'Connor**, Deputy Librarian, Dundalk Institute of Technology (Chair)
- Ms. Patricia Patton, Assistant Librarian, Irish Council of General Practitioners
- **Mr. Padraic Cuffe, Student Affairs Manager (ret'd) IT Sligo**
- Mr. John Logue , Learner Representative, UCD

**Ms. Sinéad O'Sullivan**, Director Quality Assurance & Statistical Services, NCI provided administrative assistance to the panel and acted as rapporteur to the panel on the day.

The panel received documentation 3 weeks prior to the event and had opportunity to meet several stakeholder groups throughout the day. The groups met and membership is outlined in Appendix 1.

### 1.1 Findings

The panel found the Library & Information Service to be an excellent example of a user-centred and responsive service.

The panel made 4 commendations and 9 recommendations which are outlined below

Commendations:

- The process by which the review was undertaken and the comprehensive and candid nature of the report
- Obvious flexibility of the members of staff and the teamwork evident throughout the panel visit
- The continued development & maintenance of the service within financial constraints and in a space no longer fit for purpose
- The evidence of the implementation of changes identified as part of the process
- Good cross functional relationship with other service departments

Recommendations

For the College

- Whilst recognising the financial constraints of the College, that as soon as possible, the library space should be expanded in a manner to appropriately meet learners needs e.g. quiet zones, zones for project work

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- That an active programme be put in place in order to ensure that faculty are encouraged to become more involved in the development of the library and its services and in ensuring appropriate communication between academic staff, library and learners.

## For the Library

- Named liaisons with Schools for programmes/subjects should be appointed in order to facilitate more effective communication with Schools. Library representatives should attend School meetings on a scheduled basis.
- Electronic delivery of inter-library loans should be explored e.g. British Library electronic delivery service, the Subito service
- Explore methods of marketing and communication new and existing services to users e.g. use of Blogs, email, etc.
- Review revised loan periods to ensure that they are effective. Explore possibility of extending the 2 hour loan period to 4 hours and introducing a loan period between 2 hours and 2 weeks – e.g. 3 days for heavily used items
- Investigate the use of security staff for noise patrolling
- Develop opportunities for general competency based training for all staff
- Develop capacity for greater delegation and succession planning within the library staff
- Consider an annual workshop/seminar series for all years of all programmes to ensure that learners can take advantage of services when they need to. Recognising **the constraints on staff, the use of current learners as ‘peer teachers’ should be explored.**
- Monitor the balance between full, part-time and contract staff to ensure that service quality is not affected.

## 2 Library & Information Service

The Norma Smurfit Library of the NCI is a resource for staff and students. It seeks to be a “centre of excellence”, in the provision of developments in information technology.

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## 2.1 Mission and Vision Statement of NCI Library:

Our Mission is to provide our students and users with the right information, in the right form, and at the time required; blending traditional Library services with online information sources; while holding onto our essential and unique ‘user centred’ focus.

Our Vision is to be a learning resource that is an inclusive and innovative centre of excellence.

As an independent and relatively small higher education institute, the NCI has a mixture of both formal and informal methods of operation, service and communication. The library service is facing changes and pressures due to developments in the technical aspect of library services, inadequate staffing levels at professional and permanent grades, increasing user demands on existing services/resources, and the issue of outgrowing the current physical library space. Historically, the quality of an academic Library has been described in terms of its collection and measured by the size of the Library’s holdings and various counts of its uses. Increasingly libraries will be assessed using different criteria. At the UKSG Conference 2011, the issue of increased footfall in libraries while circulation figures have decreased was discussed (John Naughton, UKSG Conference 2011). This does not mean that libraries are losing users, but that the way users access libraries and the information that libraries supply to its users have changed. In order to be relevant to users and the student experience, libraries must change, adjust to user expectations and offer services that are relevant. It is important for the Librarian to know what the Library’s users value as important for them, to shift the assessment of Library quality from the traditions of measuring collection size and counting incidents of its uses and to begin investigating how the provision of services relates to the Library users’ service quality expectations.

## 2.2 Purpose of quality review of services at National College of Ireland :-

- To assess the overall service quality of the Library System from the users’ perspectives.
- To investigate which are the essential attributes to which Library management should allocate resources for good service quality.
- To identify the problems users had encountered when using Library services

## 2.3 Terms of reference

- The review will consider the performance of the Norma Smurfit Library in terms of its stated objectives as a College service, as well as commenting on the feasibility of its plans for the future.

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- The review will be conducted in the context of the strategic plans of the College, the schools and of other administrative departments.
- The review will examine the User Experience of the Library Services at the College.
- The review will also be conducted in the context of the standards and guidelines offered by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The quality of Library services will be considered with reference to national best practice in the sector, published research and quality activities the Library has entered into.

### 2.3.1 Specific areas under review

The specific areas of the Library service under review are:

- Broad areas of Library operation, lending and inter Library loans, online databases and Web resources, collection development and management, acquisitions, cataloguing and periodicals, user education, planning and management, disability services and external professional relationships .
- A review of the adequacy of Library facilities, buildings and environment.
- A review of the organisational structure, training and deployment of staffing resources.
- A review of the Library service to off-campus students

### 2.4 Review Process Undertaken by the Library & Information Service

The Library was chosen as the first services department within the College to carry out a quality exercise and to compare its activities and services with other academic libraries. This process began in December 2010 and the initial stages of this process took the form of a reflective examination of Library services by staff, supported by evidence. Investigations of different parts of the service were embarked upon using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats evaluation method, i.e. SWOT analysis. The areas of Library operations investigated included collection management, online services, physical facilities, organisational structure, management, off campus services, user education and so on. Part of this process was a survey of the students and academic staff of the College to canvass their views and experiences of Library services as users.

The second stage consisted of four visits to other libraries to benchmark the **Norma Smurfit Library's activities and services with other academic libraries. The libraries that were chosen** were those of the Dublin Business School, Waterford Institute of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. **These are four very different** academic libraries, but which (in their own ways) share certain similarities to the operation

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and remit of the Norma Smurfit Library. The criteria used to select the libraries to visit included:

- Relative size
- Range of courses similar to National College of Ireland
- Full time, part time and off campus programmes offered by parent institution
- Irish best practice

The purpose of the review was to find out how well the Norma Smurfit Library was doing in relation to learner requirements in comparison with other institutions, and find out what areas of the service might be improved - with particular reference to the activities and experiences of other academic libraries. The third stage was the appointment of an external panel tasked to evaluate service provision against recognised and agreed criteria.

### 3 Findings in Relation to the Terms of Reference

#### 3.1 Strategic Direction and Alignment with Strategic Objectives of the College

The panel is confident that library development takes place in conjunction with the overall **strategic plan of the College**. **The panel heard that the College's strategic plan was recently agreed** but is subject to changes that will be brought through engagement with and impact of **the HEA's strategy** for higher education.

The library will consider publishing a strategic or development plan of its own, however due to constraints on the service, the publication of an annual report will most likely be implemented through the overall College annual report.

An area that requires development on behalf of the College is the development of deeper relationships with all Faculty in order to ensure that the library service is appropriately developed according to the academic needs of the College and that communication between faculty, the library and learners needs to be improved - particularly in the case of book and resource lists. The reconstitution of the Library Committee as envisaged by the Librarian as well as the development of the Coursebuilder project should assist in this.

The staffing of the Library is highly dependent on part-time and contract staff. This currently does not affect the day to day running of the library due to the high degree of flexibility of the staff. However, this should be monitored to ensure that the quality of service is not negatively affected.

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### 3.2 Organisation & Management of the Function

Using evidence from the self-evaluation report, additional information provided at the event and the interaction with each of the stakeholder groups, there is sufficient evidence that the Library function is well managed.

#### *Standard Operating Procedures*

An outcome of the review process was a review and rewriting of all standard operating procedures. This involved all members of the team and as evidenced from engagement with both groups of library staff, the process appears to have made them more aware of the need to evaluate processes on an on-going basis.

#### *Loan Periods*

Whilst understanding the motivations behind removing the short loan period, the panel was of the view that the desk loan period may be too short and that an additional short loan period e.g. 3 days could be introduced. The panel heard that it would be useful for academic staff to recommend a range of materials for core subjects rather than just one text – this would ease pressures on key texts and provide valid alternatives to learners.

#### *Inter-library Loans*

In terms of the management of interlibrary loans, the panel recommends that library staff review how this is currently managed in terms of being able to deliver items electronically to **users. The use of the British Library's electronic service** or the Subito Service should be explored.

#### *Staff Development*

The panel notes the profile of the staff of the library and commends the library staff on their flexibility and obvious teamwork. It heard that access to professional and mandatory training was readily available and recommends that opportunities for the development of broader competencies are explored. Staff development should also include an element of succession planning and opportunities for delegation of responsibilities from the Librarian to other members of staff.

#### *Space*

A critical issue facing the library is that it has outgrown its current footprint and due to changes in teaching & assessment methodologies there is a greater need for different types



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of space for project work and quiet study. The post-graduate students met by the panel appeared not to know about the dedicated post-graduate study room that the College has made available, which was also evidenced by its lack of use when the panel visited the space. Whilst recognising the financial constraints on the College, the panel recommends that as soon as is possible, that the library space is expanded within the space designated for this expansion.

### ***User Education***

The library staff discovered through their own evaluation that users are unaware of many of the services available to them. In looking at induction and orientation, recommendation is made to ensure that each year of study, appropriate information skills are provided to learners. As outlined above a deeper relationship with the academic community may also assist in communicating library resources and services to learners. Somewhat surprisingly, some learners felt that they would only approach library staff for assistance as a last resort. Learners met suggested that using other learners in a similar fashion to the IT lab assistants would be a useful way to help ease learners into basic information skills e.g. using the catalogue, understanding Dewey classification, thus releasing library staff for more advanced information skills training. That the library staff is involved in noise patrols may also detract from the positive relationship that they with learners. If possible, security staff should be more involved in this process.

### **3.3 Functions' services to internal/external stakeholders as appropriate**

The panel heard that the library staff played a key role in the life of the College – being represented on academic committees, plagiarism committee etc. The self-evaluation report outlines the external activities of the library staff. A feature of the interaction with all internal groups was the obvious high regard in which the library and its staff are held.

### **3.4 The use of evidence to support decision making**

The panel heard that this is an area of development within the library where initially statistical information from the library system will be used to inform acquisition and disposal of resources as well as provision of services.

### **3.5 Cross College engagement and communication**

As outlined earlier, it has been recognised that a greater depth of engagement with academic staff is required to inform the future development of the service and ensure appropriate services are provided to learners. Academic staff met by the panel agreed that

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they needed to provide information to the library earlier. Communication with other service providers appears to be very good with a very close working relationship with the IT department has been developed.

### 3.6 How the function supports compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

This process has raised the awareness of quality assurance within the library service among staff. In having a quality assurance system for service functions, NCI is ensuring that guidelines relating to appropriate learner resources and staff development are met. The external links created as part of this process will assist the library in further developing its practice. The intention of the library to continue with periodic evaluation of key functions over and above the central service evaluation and use of information systems to inform policy and practice is noted.

## 4 Conclusion

It is clear to the panel both from the documentation supplied and through participation in discussions with all stakeholder groups that the library service has been significantly engaged with and benefited greatly from this process. The panel commends and thanks the library staff for the manner in which they approached the process and the open manner in which they engaged in deliberations on the day. The panel wishes the team well in implementing the recommendations of their self-evaluation and of those contained in the report and looks forward to reviewing the follow up report a year hence.

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## 5 Appendix 1: Agenda & Participants

Service under Review	Library & Information Service
Date of Review	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2011
NCI Lead	Mary Buckley, Librarian
Panel Members:	
Chair	<b>Ms. Lorna O'Connor</b> , Deputy Librarian, DKIT
	Ms. Patricia Patton, Assistant Librarian, ICGP
	<b>Mr. Padraic Cuffe</b> , Student Affairs Manager (ret'd) IT Sligo
	Mr. John Logue , Student Representative UCD
Rapporteur	<b>Ms. Sinéad O'Sullivan</b>

### Agenda

Time	Session	Personnel Involved
9am-10am	Briefing/Meeting of Panel with QASS office	PRG, DOASS
10am-11am	Meeting with President , Registrar & Librarian	PRG, PRES, REG, LIB
11-11.30	Coffee & Panel Deliberation	
11.30-12.00 noon	Meeting with Library Staff Gp 1	Library Staff
12-12.30	Meeting with Services	(IT, FIN, PREM, SS, HR)
12.30-1pm	Review of Supporting material	PRG
1pm-2pm	Lunch and Panel Deliberation	PRG
2pm-2.30	Meeting with Academic Users	Faculty
2.30-3pm	Meeting with Library Staff Gp 2	Library Staff
3pm-3.15	Coffee & Panel Deliberation	PRG
3.15-3.45	Meeting with Learners	
3.45-4.30	Panel Deliberation and Draft Report	PRG
4.30-5PM	Oral Feedback to Registrar & Librarian	PRG

### Documents Provided to the Panel:

- Terms of Reference
- Self Evaluation Report & Appendices
- NCI policy on Services Review

PRG: Peer Review Group  
 PRES: President  
 REG: Registrar  
 LIB: Librarian

QASS  
DQASS: Director Quality Assurance & Statistical Services  
FIN: Finance Office  
IT: IT Department  
SS: Student Services & Support  
HR: HR Dept  
PREM: Premises

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Library Quality Review

Session Attendees:

Session 1: 10-11am:

**President:** Dr. Phillip Matthews

**Registrar:** Mr. John McGarrigle

**Librarian:** Ms. Mary Buckley

Session 2: 11:30 am Library Staff, Gp 1

Mr. Tim Lawless, Assistant Librarian

Ms. Stephanie Doyle, Information Project Officer

Ms. Maeve Byrne, Snr. Library Assistant

Mr. Joe Dooley, Library Assistant

Session 3: 12noon - Services

Ms. Geraldine Minogue, Manager IT Dept

Ms. Niamh McAuley, Director Student Services

Ms. Patricia Ryan, Finance

Mr. Tom Ryder, Facilities Manager

Ms. Therese Brown, HR

Session 4: 2pm- Faculty

Ms. Karen Murray, Lecturer Law

Ms. Corina Sheerin, Lecturer Finance

Ms. Rachel Doherty, Lecturer HRM

Mr. Desmond Gibney, Lecturer Accounting

Ms. Ellen Byrne, Assoc. Lecturer – Bus

Mr. Paul Stynes, Lecturer Computing

Mr. Ron Elliot, Assoc Lecturer, Computing

Session 5: 2.30 – Library Staff, Grp 2

Mr. Keith Brittle, Library Assistant

Mr. Gerard Farrell, Library Assistant

Sinead Corcoran, Library Assistant

Marian Farrell, Library Assistant

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Session 6: 3.15 - Learners

Ms. Janice Massala, BA(H) HRM

Mr. Gavin Maher, BSc in Computing

Mr. Michael Nicell, PG Diploma in Management (PT)

Mr. Robert Griffith, PGD in Management (PT)

Mr. Mark Biggar; BA(H) Finance (PT)