



Peer Review Group Report

Admission Office 2016

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1 CONTEXT FOR REVIEW

- 1.1. This report presents the findings of a quality review of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) Admissions Office, at the RCSI, which was undertaken in 31st May - 2nd June 2016.
- 1.2. RCSI is the second oldest third-level academic institution in Ireland. RCSI is both [a] a health sciences Higher Education Institution with Schools of Leadership, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Postgraduate Studies, and [b] a Postgraduate Training Body in Surgery and related specialties. RCSI is one of four Royal Colleges of Surgeons in Great Britain and Ireland (Edinburgh, England, Glasgow and Ireland). The RCSI School of Medicine was established in 1886 and RCSI became a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. In the decade from 1996 to 2006, RCSI underwent significant expansion through the establishment of additional Schools/Institutes on the Dublin campus, and of three new international campuses (Penang Medical College, RCSI-Bahrain and RCSI-Dubai). Following an institutional review commissioned jointly by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), RCSI was granted independent degree awarding powers in 2010. In 2011, RCSI entered into a licensing agreement with Perdana University (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) to establish the PU-RCSI School of Medicine. In 2012, RCSI launched the '3U Partnership' in conjunction with Dublin City University and the National University of Ireland Maynooth. In May 2013, RCSI was ranked in the top 200 medical schools in the world in the QS University Rankings. RCSI is among the top 50 most international universities in the world (Times Higher Education University World Rankings, 2014-15).
- 1.3. RCSI is an independent, not-for-profit health sciences institution with charitable status in the Republic of Ireland. The institution operates a primarily self-funding model, with State funding accounting for less than 20% of total income. The model is based on the education of a substantial cohort of international students alongside Irish/EU students.

Methodology for Review

- 1.4. A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) was developed by the staff of the Admissions Office (AO) between January and March 2016. The Peer Review Group (PRG) welcomes the involvement of all staff within the office in this aspect of the review, either in the preparation and writing of the report, or the collation of appendices and support material.
- 1.5. The PRG finds the SAR to be thorough in its presentation of the functions and activities of the office. It further succinctly outlines a number of challenges currently faced by the Unit, and includes a number of suggested recommendations and requests for input from the PRG. The PRG notes that in places, the further development of a critically reflective approach to self-assessment would have been welcome in a number of aspects of the report e.g. a more in-depth critical reflection on internal communication and communication structures between the AO and other parts of RCSI. The SAR was accompanied by an extensive range of appendices and supplementary material, which provided valuable context to the PRG prior to, and during their visit.
- 1.6. Prior to their visit, the PRG reviewed the SAR and accompanying support material to create a summary document of preliminary comments. At their initial meeting, the members used these initial comments to discuss and develop a number of key themes and areas for further exploration. These formed the basis of discussions with key stakeholder groups during the visit.

Purpose of the Review

- 1.7. The self-assessment exercise is a process by which a Unit reflects on its mission and objectives, and analyses critically the activities it engages in to achieve these objectives. It provides for an evaluation

of the Unit's performance of its functions, its services and its administration. In line with the RCSI strategic plan 'Growth and Excellence' it provides assurance to the College of the quality of the Unit's operations and facilitates a developmental process to effect improvement. The fundamental objectives of the review process are to:

- Monitor the quality of the student experience.
- Identify, encourage and disseminate good practice, and to identify challenges and how to address these.
- Provide an opportunity for Units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
- Encourage the development and enhancement of these systems, in the context of current and emerging provision.
- Inform the College's strategic planning process.
- Provide an external benchmark on practice.
- Provide public information on the College's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The College's implementation of its quality procedures also enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The Review Process

1.8. The key stages in the internal review process are:

1. Establishment of a Self-assessment Committee
2. Preparation of a SAR and supporting documentation
3. Site visit by the PRG that includes external experts both national and international
4. Preparation of a PRG report that is made public
5. Development of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for implementation of the PRG recommendations (that is made public)
6. Follow-up to appraise progress against the QIP

Membership of the Peer Review Group

1.9. The members of the PRG were:

- **Ms. Aisling McKenna**, Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research, Dublin City University
- **Dr. William Lee Mitchell**, Director of International Development, University of Bradford
- **Dr. Jane Sherwood**, Director of Graduate Admissions and Funding, University of Oxford

- **Prof. Marie Guidon**, Head of School of Physiotherapy, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

The PRG were also joined by Mr. Mark Collins, who acted as Technical Writer / Rapporteur for the review.

Terms of Reference for the Peer Review Group

1.1.0. The terms of reference of the PRG were to:

- Evaluate critically the SAR and the supporting documentation
- Verify how well the aims and objectives of the Unit are being fulfilled, having regard to the available resources, and comment on the appropriateness of the Unit's mission, objectives and strategic plan
- Comment on how well the Unit fits with the strategic plans for the College as a whole
- Evaluate the Unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as outlined in the SAR
- Discuss any perceived strengths and weaknesses not identified in the SAR
- Assess the suitability of the working environment(s)
- Comment on any recommendations proposed by the Unit in the SAR
- Make appropriate recommendations for improvement, with due consideration of resource implications

2 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE UNIT

- 2.1. The AO is responsible for the recruitment and admission of all EU and non-EU students to the undergraduate schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Physiotherapy in Dublin, and in addition provides support in the recruitment of students to the programmes offered in RCSI's overseas campuses.
- 2.2. The AO has two core areas of responsibility:
 - 1) Admissions: To provide a comprehensive admissions function to process and select the most suitable EU and non-EU candidates for the undergraduate medicine, pharmacy and physiotherapy programmes.
 - 2) Student Recruitment: To develop and deliver comprehensive student recruitment activities to attract high quality non-EU and, on a smaller scale, EU applicants.
- 2.3. From the late 1990s, the office has seen significant growth in admissions and student recruitment (ASR) activities which have been driven by the introduction of new courses (undergraduate Pharmacy and Physiotherapy and Graduate Entry Medicine) and a growth in student intake numbers. Entry pathway options have increased from four in 2001 to eight in 2015. The additional pathways each produce a new set of recruitment and admissions requirements which add to the complexity of delivering the service.
- 2.4. The office has recently undergone a restructure to provide a dedicated resource to focus solely on non-EU student recruitment. The redesign within the office now allows for dedicated student recruitment staff and dedicated admissions staff. The International Student Recruitment (ISR) team in Dublin also participate in Student Recruitment activities and planning for Penang Medical College and RCSI-Bahrain.
- 2.5. The RCSI Dublin office has 6.25 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) which comprise of an Associate Director (0.75 FTE), five Administrative staff and a 0.5 FTE Academic Director of Admissions. The Associate Director (who is also Head of Student Services) reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer. The five administrative staff are allocated to the following responsibilities: EU Admissions Officer (1 FTE), Admissions and Secretarial (2.2 FTEs) and International Student Recruitment (1.8 FTEs). The length of time in post for staff members varies widely from 1.5 years to 18 years.

3 PLANNING, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

- 3.1. The AO benefits from strong leadership by the Associate Director who is very aware of changes in global markets and has ensured that the AO has consistently delivered on student targets within budget. Another strength of the AO is its responsiveness to emergencies, for example, the Penang ASR has had success in turning around a potential crisis in recruitment numbers due to the discontinuation of state funding. Long-term relationships have been developed with external stakeholders (such as the Kuwaiti Cultural Office) and this is underpinned by the professional way in which the AO represents the institution to external stakeholders.
- 3.2. However, the strategic working described above is largely tacit and is not articulated explicitly. There is no written marketing strategy in place [SAR p.13], which may be hindering the ability to take a longer view. This is reflected in the SAR objectives (SAR section 3.1) that are a mix of very short-term goals and longer-term objectives, which are both operational and strategic in nature. There is a danger that the long-term objectives are treated as actions that can be put off until later (e.g. the SAR notes the timeline for further collaboration with the alumni office, as a priority for Year 3 of the plan).
- 3.3. There were inconsistencies between the RCSI Strategic Plan 2013-2017 'Growth and Excellence' and how it was described in the SAR [SAR p. 12]; there is no mention of Strategic Goal 2 (Leadership in International Medical Education) which includes growing and diversifying the student base. Important strategic directions (e.g. increasing the quality of applicants in medicine and growing the Pharmacy intake) inform the ASRs but do not feature in an explicit strategy. It has been difficult to align the AO's strategic needs with institutional strategy e.g. the need for a mobile enabled website, the need to increase the use of social media, the need to develop an RCSI proposition for potential students. The remit of the AO is also not clear in relation to recruitment to RCSI-Bahrain.
- 3.4. The challenges are likely to increase as the RCSI is 'no longer a small institution'. RCSI is moving from a 'selecting' institution (selecting from a surplus of applications) to a 'recruiting' institution and needs to remain competitive. There is also awareness that it is important to reduce the risk of relying on one individual as a single source of institutional and market knowledge in relation to the AO activities.
- 3.5. The PRG believes that RCSI needs to put in place strategy and structures which would allow the scaling up needed for an increasingly competitive recruitment market.
- 3.6. An international recruitment strategy (direction, markets, operation of the AO) could be made explicit without restricting flexibility should market conditions or RCSI requirements change. This needs to link to top-level strategy and should thread through all levels to operational planning within the AO.
- 3.7. Based on the documentation provided, the Admissions Committee did not consider longer-term strategic questions, particularly how an integrated institutional effort could be put behind student recruitment. Consideration should be given to replacing this by establishing a Steering Group with broader representation, including the Senior Management Team (SMT), to support this strategic planning for the AO.
- 3.8. The PRG meetings with internal stakeholders included discussion on the need for better market intelligence, in particular for Pharmacy. There needs to be a strategic approach to market entry which is grounded in strong market intelligence. The data analysis (of RCSI's own data) and market intelligence (e.g. external market trends) functions need to be strengthened. The AO prepares a comprehensive Annual Admissions report. This would normally be carried out not by an Admissions and Recruitment function but by a Planning or Registry function. If responsibility was moved (while ensuring some input from the AO) this could enable an AO resource to be freed up and used to develop market intelligence for new market entry.

Commendations

- Strong strategic leadership, responsiveness and delivery to targets by the Associate Director.
- The positive role that the AO plays as ambassadors for RCSI when travelling abroad. Internal stakeholders described their approach to representing RCSI as 'very professional'.

Recommendations

- Develop an RCSI Steering Committee to inform strategic decision-making for admissions and student recruitment activities with membership drawn from the Schools, relevant professional support Units and the SMT. This would consider strategic direction, coordination of international planning of activities, the remit of the AO (e.g. in relation to RCSI-Bahrain), postgraduate recruitment and recommendations on additional staff resources.
- Develop an International Recruitment and Admissions strategy and implementation plan. This should align with the corporate and School strategies and include metrics for the effectiveness of activities and the performance of the AO.
- Develop plans for international growth focusing on comprehensive and evidence-based market intelligence tailored to the needs of specific Schools (undergraduate and postgraduate), markets and activities.
- Expand data-analysis expertise in the RCSI to inform Admissions and Student Recruitment activities in collaboration with Schools/academic Units.
- The PRG endorses the introduction of AO planning sessions. These sessions should contextualise the 18 month operational plans within the longer-term International Recruitment and Admissions Strategy.

4 FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES

- 4.1. The structural position of the AO, as a sister office to Student Services under the same Director, facilitates a fruitful focus on a seamless student experience from applicant to registered student. Academic colleagues commented that the AO has ‘a real sense of the student journey’, and that ‘every student counts’. Within this structure the staff provide a personalised and positive student service. Even offer holders who decline their offer testify in AO surveys to the smooth and pleasant application process provided by the staff and systems of the AO (SAR Appendix 4). Students described positive relationships with a welcoming AO, whether from the AO’s presence on pre-sessional Facebook pages to in-person enquiries. Individual care is provided e.g. a customised induction programme for a late starter. Students were impressed that they could see suggestions they had made in student focus groups being acted upon.

Commendations - Student Focus

- Consistently positive feedback from students on their experience of engaging with the AO, supported by their close working relationship between the AO and Student Services, Fees Office, Porters Office, etc.
 - The PRG found evidence of the AO ‘closing the feedback loop’ in response to student feedback, and student knowledge that their suggestions and feedback had led to subsequent enhancement within the AO.
- 4.2. The AO is keen to embrace digital working in its admissions and student recruitment activities, and has a commendable appetite to build on what it has already put in place. The successful introduction of the Apply Online system in 2015 is creditable. The need to create the ‘Study With Us’ element of the RCSI website was recognised, the project was tackled with energy and enthusiasm, and the guiding team within the AO took an analytical approach to what was needed e.g. using student focus groups and competitor analysis. Within the limits of the current Content Management System (CMS) of the existing RCSI website strong results have been achieved: the information and navigation on Undergraduate Research, Open Days and International Campuses are clearly presented, and the display and categorisation of the course information is also very strong. The Moodle site, RSC-Eye (a collaboration by the AO and Student Services) recognises RCSI’s increasing emphasis on student recruitment, and the need to ‘convert’ offer-holders into registered students.
- 4.3. The web-based interview system, Sonru, was an innovation introduced in response to an external emergency, and its continued use has proved it was a strong choice. As well as rationalising the use of interviewers’ time and reducing travel costs, it supports fair admissions as all applicants can be interviewed regardless of their geographical location.

Commendations - Utilising Technology to Enhance Processes

- Within the limitations of the current RCSI web infrastructure, the proactive work, in collaboration with the IT Services department, to develop the ‘Study With Us’ element of the RCSI website, to improve and enhance the structure and quality of information provided to prospective students.
 - The positive collaboration between the AO and Student Support Services in developing the Moodle site, RSC-Eye, which provides prospective students with a range of information, and opportunity for online peer engagement for accepted applicants prior to registering at the RCSI.
 - Developed in response to an operational emergency, the digitisation of the interview process through the Sonru system is regarded as a positive step by internal stakeholders, reducing the cost, and enhancing the efficiency of the recruitment process.
- 4.4. This review comes at a time of change for the AO as the RCSI pursues a strategy of growth and diversification. The AO is adapting its processes and activities to support this – often with success, but

still with further strides to take. A team once dedicated to admissions administration is now being asked to add proactive student recruitment and marketing to its remit: one member of staff to support this area has been added in the last two years to an otherwise long-standing team. There are some legacies of past times, such as the brief and business-like offer letters (Annual Report 2015) which miss an opportunity to congratulate and convert offerees into students. Good efforts are being made with hard-copy student recruitment 'tri-fold' brochures, but the team is encouraged to go beyond the annual update proposed in the SAR, and to work with colleagues to define the unique selling points (USPs) of RCSI, then reflect them in more compelling material (e.g. more up-to-date design, more dynamic imagery, inclusion of website links, reduced text length and avoidance of capitalised text). As part of the greater linkage of the AO to overall institutional strategy, as per section 3 above, RCSI could consider the best name for the AO in future.

- 4.5.** The AO needs strong relationships with a wide range of internal stakeholders to fulfil its remit successfully, and the PRG heard oral evidence of good partnership working, although this aspect of the AO's function was not much analysed in the SAR. Relations with Student Services and the Finance Office appeared positive. The AO clearly sees the potential to work together with the newly established Alumni Office, using recent alumni in student recruitment because of the strength of peer-to-peer recruitment, and both offices are encouraged to take this forward. The PRG would support the organisation of resources to take forward the Student Ambassador programme envisaged in the SAR. However, the PRG also found evidence of 'silo working' and a lack of clarity about the roles and intersections especially with the RCSI's marketing and communications functions. Greater strategic alignment, and a wider institutional understanding of the fundamental importance of successful student recruitment and admissions to the health and ambitions of RCSI, should be helpful here. The AO could assist the Porters Office with the increasing volume of college tours which they conduct (a valuable contribution to RCSI's recruitment drive), by advertising scheduled tour times clearly on the website at a high level.
- 4.6.** The PRG consistently heard evidence that certain members of the AO excelled in their roles. To ensure all AO services reach this level, the AO should consider an explicit focus on the concept of customer service. Academic and professional colleagues see the AO as an increasingly essential 'front of house' service, as well as key to back-office administration, so a concentration on what internal and external stakeholders require (from how the phone is answered to the look and feel of the website) would be beneficial. To be sure they are meeting customer needs, and deploying resources effectively, as well as assessing if the resources for the task are adequate, the AO could measure the volume and impact of its activities such as telephone calls, emails, web-views of pages and FAQs, scheduled and drop-in visitors to the office, college tours etc. on a monthly basis, thus building the picture over the years ('customer service analytics'). This would extend the data available to the AO to measure and improve its work, in addition to the good established pattern of offer-holder surveys and student focus groups.
- 4.7.** The AO is working to create an evidence-informed culture. Academic and professional staff commented that up-to-date data on offers and acceptances are generally readily available. Regular and detailed reports are made by the AO throughout the admissions cycle and in the Annual Report. The PRG noted that data analyses were often one-year snapshots, without much trend analysis, and an enormous amount of data is produced (taking a great deal of time due to the limitations of the reporting tools). The AO could investigate what use colleagues make of these reports and assess whether the cost/benefit ratio is in balance. The AO has historically been solely responsible for the production and analysis of data relating to admissions, but with increased institutional investment in data analysis capacity, the AO is encouraged to hand over responsibility as appropriate. This will involve using core IT systems so many users can access and interrogate the data independently, with less responsibility for staff within the AO to store data locally, such as local Excel spreadsheets. This should create new capacity to support the new student recruitment functions of the office.
- 4.8.** The AO appreciates that the RCSI website is a crucial marketing tool, and is to be congratulated on the effective creation of the 'Study With Us' section of the website in 2015. The drive, determination

and willingness to learn new skills (such as HTML programming) demonstrated by the team responsible within the AO produced a model which other RCSI offices were able to adopt. To make further necessary improvements the AO is reliant on RCSI adopting a new CMS for its website, which supports modern features and critically, will be enabled for mobile devices. The PRG strongly supports the AO in flagging to the institution the need for swift progress to be made in this web replacement project, as a compelling website is vital to underpin RCSI's student recruitment expansion plans. Meanwhile, the AO is encouraged to undertake more than the annual factual update of all information as proposed in the SAR. On a simple level, this means removing references to events as forthcoming, once they have taken place. It also means continuing with regular benchmarking of the site against the offerings of peer institutions (not only domestically but also internationally) to ensure the site reflects RCSI's emphasis on excellence.

- 4.9.** The PRG noted the absence of social media icons from printed marketing materials, and learnt in meetings that an institutional social media policy, guidelines and training are coming on stream. The AO rightly perceives in the SAR that its comparative lack of social media activity needs addressing swiftly, given the audiences it is seeking to engage with. Reflecting on the AO's success in creating a web template which other departments could adopt, the PRG suggests consideration is given to the AO being a pilot department for the adoption of the new social media policy, as the same team within the AO has the imagination and drive to succeed in breaking new ground.
- 4.10.** The AO is aware that it handles personal and sensitive data. The PRG encourages the AO to continue to stay abreast of the latest best practice in data protection, e.g. in team members' work on site and remotely, and in the choice of suppliers for tools such as surveys.

Recommendations

- Prioritise the implementation of the new RCSI website and ensure ongoing consultation with the AO so that it meets RCSI's student recruitment needs.
- Propose that the AO take a lead as champions of the use of social media as part of RCSI's new social media strategy, given:
 - Their student audience is a key consumer of such media.
 - Their successful innovation with IT Services of the 'Study with Us' section of RCSI's website which provided a template of benefit to other departments.
- Endorse the further engagement of current students and recent alumni as peer-to-peer recruiters, e.g.:
 - Development of the concept of the Student Ambassador Programme.
 - Student-led videos, blogs and vlogs.
- Create a strong working relationship with the newly enhanced Alumni Office e.g.:
 - Sharing and aligning information on potential and actual student sponsors and donors so that activities are mutually informed and integrated.

5 MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

- 5.1. The AO, located on the ground floor of the St Stephen's Green campus, is adjacent to the Student Services Office. Both offices have recently been redesigned and the open-plan accommodation appears to facilitate a close working relationship between the offices and offers a seamless service to students during the admissions and student registration processes.
- 5.2. The extensive knowledge of, and insight into, the complexity of factors in the Admissions and Student Recruitment activities possessed by the Associate Director was evident during the review process and acknowledged by both internal and external stakeholders. However, this has resulted in an over-reliance on the Associate Director. The appointment of a Deputy would balance the workload and develop the institutional knowledge around these activities.
- 5.3. Many of the current AO staff have served in a number of capacities in RCSI prior to their current position in the AO. Members of the Student Recruitment team previously worked in the private sector for a number of years prior to their RCSI appointment. Staff possess a range of qualifications and have participated in a variety of in-house training sessions over the past 18 months. However, it is important that future staff development is aligned with the growth and diversity of student recruitment activities and that appropriate skills are developed to meet those demands.
- 5.4. Departmental staff have been proactive in developing a database to inform recruitment activities. However, the introduction of a centralised, institutional CRM system would enhance the scope of information available and facilitate more sophisticated data analysis to inform admissions and recruitment activities.
- 5.5. Weekly departmental meetings enable ongoing discussion, review of activities and progress and highlight any issues that may have arisen. However, the introduction of more formally structured meetings, e.g. on a biannual, annual basis, would promote a more strategic approach to planning.

Commendations

- The redesign of the AO and Student Services office space, which has facilitated further and enhanced opportunities for collaborative working between both teams.

Recommendations

- Appoint a Deputy to the Associate Director to support the increasing demands of international recruitment, resourcing to be determined by the SMT.
- Undertake a skills-need assessment within the AO to inform a subsequent staff development plan.
- Encourage the development of a culture of consistent excellence in customer service, across multiple stakeholders and communication channels.

6 EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

- 6.1. The AO is responsible for the ongoing management of a number of crucial external relationships. During the review visit, the PRG had an opportunity to discuss the relationship between the AO and a number of these external stakeholders, including the Kuwait Cultural Office, admissions and recruitment staff from RCSI Bahrain, key administrative and recruitment staff based in Penang College of Medicine and staff from Atlantic Bridge. The PRG welcome the inclusion of these key stakeholders as part of the review, and note the considerable planning that had taken place to facilitate discussions with these stakeholders as part of the review. The PRG further acknowledge openness among these participants to fully engage with this element of the PRG visit, and the broader quality assurance process.
- 6.2. In almost all instances, the external stakeholders described their relationship with the AO in positive and warm terms. The PRG got a strong sense that the depth of knowledge and an understanding of stakeholder needs within the leadership of the AO. One example of external feedback received in this regard was a description of the relationship with RCSI admissions as 'our closest and best relationship'.
- 6.3. Feedback from these external groups often noted that RCSI had been responsive to the needs of the external stakeholders, e.g. the development of the IMCP Programme with IT Tralee with Kuwaiti Cultural Office, and the development of the ASR Penang Group with UCD and Penang Medical College to coordinate the ongoing development and sustainability of the College in Penang. In the feedback from the Penang stakeholder group, they described the AO as client focused and creative in their approach to managing the relationships and in dealing with changes within the external environment, with one individual noting that the 'RCSI listens, and improves'. Further, the PRG also note that in describing the day-to-day admissions activities conducted by the AO, the external stakeholders described their interactions with staff within the office as responsive and efficient.
- 6.4. The PRG consider that while the Penang Medical College ASR Group appears to be working effectively, the application of the same approach to managing the relationship with the team in RCSI Bahrain appears to have been less effective.
- 6.5. On a positive note, prospective students to RCSI in Dublin and RCSI Bahrain can choose to make a simultaneous application to both locations using a single application, and this application process appears to be managed smoothly between both locations. However, there was evidence to suggest that there was currently a lack of clarity with regard to the responsibilities for international recruitment activities between RCSI Bahrain and the RCSI in Dublin, and a sense that the current ASR Group structure is currently not optimising the collaboration between both locations. The PRG therefore recommend a review of current structures for collaboration with a view to refining opportunities for the alignment of activities including client-network alignment and coordination of respective recruitment activities across both locations.
- 6.6. More broadly, given the importance and value of maintaining and developing the current external stakeholder network, and further, the exploration of new markets and extension of recruitment activities to both pharmacy and physiotherapy disciplines, the PRG considers that it is timely for the AO to design and implement a relationship management system (RMS) to manage increasingly complex relationships, coordinated through a number of RCSI offices and international locations. For greatest efficiency and impact, this should be completed in alignment with the development of data refinement and relationship management systems elsewhere in the College, e.g. with collaboration with the Alumni Office, Schools and RCSI international offices.

Commendations

- Evidence of strong, positive working relationships with key external sponsors, agents, and partners, with the AO being described by a number of important external partners as ‘the closest and best working relationship’, and one where ‘RCSI listens, and improves.’
- In managing the operational aspects of external partnerships, in processing and managing applications, the work of the AO was described as ‘responsive’, ‘professional’, ‘friendly’ and ‘efficient’.

Recommendations

- Develop and implement an institutional CRM system for management of external stakeholder relationships.
- Clarify where responsibility lies for recruitment to RCSI Bahrain and ensure that this is used to make explicit the remit of the RCSI Bahrain ASR. This may require direction from the proposed Steering Group.

7 RCSI ADMISSIONS OFFICE SWOT ANALYSIS

- 7.1. The PRG note the development of a SWOT by the AO as part of their SAR. Additions or amendments to this SWOT by the PRG are inserted into the table in ***bold italics***. With respect to Opportunities and Challenges, the PRG have noted a number of issues, which, while internal to RCSI are external to the management control of the AO.

- 7.2. The PRG note the development of a SWOT by the AO as part of their SAR. The PRG broadly agree with the issues raised within the SWOT analysis, and consider the preparation of the SWOT to be comprehensive in its approach and review of the area's activities. The PRG notes that further consideration should be given to how the AO builds on its very positive internal and external working relationships to ensure the ongoing success and future development of the office. The PRG consider that the AO could further reflect on how opportunities to enhance presence social media presence and enhancements to its web presence can provide further opportunities to communicate effectively with prospective students.

8 SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. The PRG commends the following:

1. The positive role that the AO plays as ambassadors for RCSI when travelling abroad. Internal stakeholders described their approach to representing RCSI as 'very professional'.
2. Strong strategic leadership, responsiveness and delivery to targets by the Associate Director.
3. Evidence of strong, positive working relationships with key external sponsors, agents, and partners, with the AO being described by a number of important external partners as 'the closest and best working relationship', and one where 'RCSI listens, and improves'.
4. The redesign of the AO and Student Services Office space, which has facilitated further and enhanced opportunities for collaborative working between both teams.
5. Consistently positive feedback from students on their experience of engaging with the AO, supported by the close working relationship between the AO and Student Services, Schools, Fees Office and Porters Office.
6. The PRG found evidence of the AO 'closing the feedback loop' in response to student feedback, and student knowledge that their suggestions and feedback had led to subsequent enhancement within the AO.
7. Developed in response to an external adversity, the digitisation of the interview process through the Sonru system is regarded as a positive step by internal stakeholders, reducing the cost, and enhancing the efficiency of the recruitment process.
8. Within the limitations of the current RCSI web infrastructure, the proactive work, in collaboration with the IT Services department, to develop the 'Study With Us' element of the RCSI website, to improve and enhance the structure and quality of information provided to prospective students.
9. In managing the operational aspects of external partnerships, in processing and managing applications, the work of the AO was described as 'responsive', 'professional' and 'efficient'.
10. The positive collaboration between the AO and Student Support Services in developing the Moodle site 'RCS-Eye' which provides offer-holders with a range of information, and opportunity for online peer engagement with other offer-holders prior to registering at RCSI.

8.2. The PRG recommends the following:

RCSI Institution Level Recommendations

1. Develop an RCSI Steering Committee to inform strategic decision-making for admission and student recruitment activities with membership drawn from the Schools, relevant professional support Units and the SMT. This could include if and where any additional staff resources may be required.
2. Develop plans for international growth focusing on comprehensive and evidence-based market intelligence tailored to the needs of specific Schools (undergraduate and postgraduate), markets and activities.

3. Expand data-analysis expertise in RCSI to inform Admission and Student Recruitment activities in collaboration with Schools/academic Units.
4. Undertake a skills-need assessment within the AO to inform a subsequent staff development plan.
5. Develop and implement an institutional CRM system for the management of external stakeholder relationships.
6. Prioritise the implementation of the new RCSI website and ensure ongoing consultation with the AO so that it meets RCSI's student recruitment needs.

For the Admissions Office

1. Appoint a Deputy to the Associate Director to support the increasing demands of international recruitment, resourcing to be determined by the SMT.
2. Develop an International Recruitment and Admissions strategy and implementation plan. This should align with the corporate and School strategies and include metrics for the effectiveness of activities and the performance of the AO.
3. Endorse the introduction of AO planning sessions. These sessions should contextualise the 18 month operational plans within the longer-term International Recruitment and Admissions Strategy.
4. Clarify where responsibility lies for recruitment to RCSI Bahrain and ensure that this is used to make explicit the remit of the RCSI Bahrain ASR. This may require direction from the proposed Steering Group.
5. Propose that the AO take a lead as champions of the use of social media as part of RCSI's new social media strategy, given:
 - Their student audience is a key consumer of such media.
 - Their successful innovation with IT Services of the 'Study with Us' section of RCSI's website which provided a template of benefit to other departments.
6. Endorse the further engagement of current students and recent alumni as peer-to-peer recruiters, e.g.:
 - Development of the concept of the Student Ambassador Programme.
 - Student-led videos, blogs and vlogs.
7. Create a strong working relationship with the newly enhanced Alumni Office e.g.:
 - Sharing and aligning information on potential and actual student sponsors and donors so that activities are mutually informed and integrated.
 - Sourcing alumni in-country to assist in student recruitment activities there and to provide content for the website.
8. Encourage the development of a culture of consistent excellence in customer service, across multiple stakeholders and communication channels.
9. Ensure website content for visitors is easily discoverable and up-to-date, e.g.:
 - The dates of past events are removed.
 - Increasing college tour demand is managed by clear publication of the standard daily tour times.
10. Endorse the culture of continuous improvement in relation to best practice in data protection.

APPENDIX 1: SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

Evening prior to site visit: Monday 30th May 2016

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Venue
30	1700 – 1730	Welcome & Introduction for PRG Director of Quality and/or QEO Review Lead	Robert Smith Room
90	1730 – 1900	Private planning meeting for members of the Peer Review Group	Robert Smith Room
	1915 – 2100	Dinner	TBC

Day 1: Tuesday 31st May 2016

Dur.	Time	Meeting Theme	Venue
	08.40	Review of preparatory work	
40	08.50 – 09.30	Meeting with Head of Unit	Robert Smith Room
30	09.30 - 10.00	Meeting with Academic Director of Admissions	
45	10.00 – 10.45	Meeting with Admissions Office Staff – Student recruitment Non EU student recruitment team	Robert Smith Room
35	10.45 – 11.20	Tea / coffee. Private meeting time for PRG	Robert Smith Room
45	11.30 – 12.15	Meeting with Admissions Office Staff – Admissions EU recruitment and EU and Non EU Admissions	Robert Smith Room
30	12.20 – 12.50	Meeting re RCSI Bahrain with representatives from RCSI Bahrain	Robert Smith Room
60	12.55 -13.55	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG	Robert Smith Room
50	14.00– 14.50	Meeting with academic staff representatives and professional academic support	Robert Smith Room
50	14.55 – 15.45	Meeting with Heads of Administration Functions	

25	15.45 – 16.10	Tea/coffee Private meeting time for PRG	
45	16.15 – 17.00	Meeting with students	
50	17.10 – 18.00	Review of afternoon's meetings.	
	19.00 – 21.00	PRG Dinner if required	Hotel

Day 2: Wednesday 1st June 2016

Dur. mins	Time	Meeting Theme	Venue
25	08.30	Private meeting time for PRG	
30	08.50 – 09.20	Meeting re Penang Medical College with representatives from PMC, UCD & RCSI	
30	09.30 – 10.00	Tour of Unit Facilities	
45	10.10 – 10.55	Meeting with professional administrative support	
25	11.00 – 11.25	Tea / coffee. Private meeting time for PRG.	
30	11.30 – 12.00	Meeting with Sponsor – Kuwait Cultural Office	
50	12.10 – 13.00	Meeting with Heads of School, Cycle Directors, Head of SARA	
60	13.00 – 14.00	Lunch & private meeting time for PRG (Option of working lunch with students)	
30	14:00 – 14:30	Meeting with Marketing Manager	
30	14.30 – 15.00	Meeting with Head of Unit	
40	15.10 – 15.50	Meeting with representatives from Atlantic Bridge	
30	16.00 – 16.30	Follow-up and clarifications meeting with HoD and team staff as appropriate	
90	16.30 – 18.00	Private meeting time for PRG members to finalise draft commendations and recommendations	
	19.30	PRG Dinner and a chance to discuss key issues	Hotel

Day 3: Thursday 2nd June 2015

	Time	Meeting Theme	Venue
30	08.30 – 09.00	Private meeting time for PRG – discussion and finalisation of Commendations and Recommendations for all sections.	
	09.00 – 09.30	Meeting with members of RCSI Senior Management Team. By VC from Bahrain	
145	09.35 – 12.00	Private meeting time for PRG – discussion and finalisation of Commendations and Recommendations for all sections.	
	10.30	Tea / coffee.	
20	12.00 – 12.20	Private meeting with QEO	
15	12.25 – 12.40	Meeting with Head of Unit & QEO	
15	12.45 – 13.00	Exit presentation to all Unit Staff	
	13.00 – 14.00	Light Lunch and Private meeting with QEO	
	14.00	Review ends.	