UNIVERSITY of NORTHUMBRIA at NEWCASTLE

Ways of Working Smarter, Not Harder:

A Fresh Look at Best Practice, Good Practice and Administrative Workflows

Executive Summary

Administrative Workflows Analysis Project

March 2000

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of the Project

To determine improved process models for student administration processes, ensuring processes operate in the most efficient and effective way to meet both internal and external requirements. A secondary objective was to suggest improved process models of benefit to the University in the purchase of the new enterprise-wide computer system. This was a unique opportunity to streamline and integrate processes across the University.

The administrative self-managed teams are already committed to a 'right first time' ethic, and colleagues who were consulted about the project recommendations agreed that further duplication of effort should be avoided wherever possible. The project recommendations are designed to smooth some of the unacceptable peaks in the administrative year, and to build on the extensive good practice identified during the course of the project.

In this report you will find recommendations for improvements in the short and longer term and acknowledgement of what we at UNN already do well. The intention is to build upon work in progress and to suggest ways in which we can work more efficiently – **smarter, not harder**. The intention is to uphold quality and standards and strengthen the support infrastructure by developing integrated, efficient and effective support processes.

The Project Team

The members of the team that carried out the project came with a wide range of skills, gained from both within the University and outside. Together the team had a broad experience across the Faculties and the Registrar's Department and a mixture of hands-on operational level experience and management overview level.

The core processes that were investigated fell under the remit of the Registrar: -

- Course and Unit Data
- Admissions
- Enrolment
- Options
- Timetabling
- Progression & Assessment
- Examination Timetabling

It also became clear that further sections would be required to highlight specific issues in relation to:

- IT systems and issues, as all the recommendations need to be underpinned by technical support and user training.
- Fees

Methodology

The team produced initial process maps of all the above processes. Key administrative staff from across the University were identified by the team and the Senior Administrators Group for the purpose of consultation about each process so that existing good practice and problems could be identified. Having gained a fuller understanding of the processes under consideration, the data was analysed in order to begin to formulate ways in which improvements could be recommended. These recommendations were explored in "Envision" meetings where ideas were tested and evaluated with the original experts consulted. Detailed analysis of ideas has been provided in the full Project Report. Implementation and change management will be the remit of the project sponsor.

The Purpose of this Document

This document represents, therefore, an abridged executive overview of the main findings of the Administrative Workflows Analysis Project. It stands alone with the proviso that much more detail and explanation is included in the body of the main report. Recommendations for improvement span the short and long term view. The topics covered in detail in the main report are core to most university administrative colleagues and thus the recommendations require the continued support of those consulted to build on current successes and succeed.

The main report is a comprehensive document gauging how effectively we deliver support. The project team challenged day to day activities, compared our practices to good practices elsewhere. Dozens of colleagues were consulted to ensure a clear picture of current processes – we listened to what was said and carefully considered any concerns expressed. What follows is a distillation of our findings in the areas listed above. Many of these are interdependent due to the interconnectedness of the processes under review.

General Issues which Emerged

It is clear that a wealth of good practice exists in relation to all of the processes reviewed and that administrative staff are dedicated to ensuring that academic staff and students are provided with the best possible service within the resource available. It is also clear that in order to provide this service, staff are sometimes working long hours and weekends in order for output to be provided by deadlines. Whilst superficially processes appeared to be carried out in a similar manner across the Faculties, investigation at a lower level, showed evidence of a range of differences and variations across the Faculties and Schools. This is usually due to the needs of the academic programme in the local areas and/or the ways in which academic staff and academic managers have chosen to interpret University policy at the micro-level. As a general principle, where systems are capable of supporting different processes without loss of effectiveness, then users are able to choose a model that best fits their structure.

Key Observations

During the course of the project, the following key observations and general principles have been identified as those which most directly support the suggested process improvements and good practice. They are therefore provided at the outset by way of a context for the project findings.

- Considerable administrative effort is expended at late stages of processes in order to correct data errors (for example, the recognition of student-unit registration problems at the exam board stage of the assessment process).

- Administrative staff are acting as a ‘safety net’ for many processes. There is an expectation that they will simply do whatever is necessary to make things work at the end of the day, irrespective of what has or has not been done/provided earlier on in the process by other staff.

- There is evidence that administrators often support academics in inappropriate ways (for example in acting as a personal secretary or in doing e-mails).

- There is a clear feeling among administrative staff that a substantial increase in the level of support/training across all systems is needed urgently. There is general recognition that many users are unfamiliar with the complex interdependence of current UNN computer systems, which has a knock-on effect on data quality.

- The APDb is generally seen as a remote system and is therefore used ineffectively.

- There is a lack of clarity in many processes with respect to the responsibilities of academic and administrative staff. This can lead to confusion and significant extra work at late stages in processes.

General Principles

- To ensure that, where possible, those responsible for the end product of a process take responsibility from beginning to end
- The overall administrative workload across the year should be smoothed to avoid high peaks reliant on goodwill
- Acceptance that data is not static – processes to incorporate flexibility
- The concept of replacing internal deadlines with Key System Dates

The team has found the investigation exercise extremely rewarding. Staff who have participated in the exercise have been extremely co-operative and willing to participate and share good practice as well as problems with the team. The team has been impressed with the range of good practice that it has discovered, and the way in which many processes are working to a high standard. The recommendations that the team has made range from small "tweaks" to large changes that may significantly alter local working practices in order to smooth the annual cycle of deliverables. It is recommended that the ideas of the project be implemented in a flexible manner in a way that is best suited to the local environment. Perhaps the most important lesson learnt from the project is that data does not remain static and must be cosseted and maintained in order for it to be of optimum use.

COURSE AND UNIT DATA

Context

The maintenance of accurate records of courses and units is fundamental to the running of an effective university administration. Considerable efforts have been made in recent years to maintain and improve data quality on all of the three main student record systems. Data on the SAS has been improved but problems have remained with the MRS and APDb data. One approach was to lock the APDb in April 1999. However, the locking of the APDb did not achieve overall what it had set out to achieve. It neither reduced the amount of late approvals, nor significantly increased the level of accuracy of APDb data. This policy has now been reversed, and Senior Administrators and Data Managers have agreed a process whereby Course Structures and student option choices can be corrected for the current academic year. A longer-term strategy to improve data quality is still necessary.

The four specific areas giving concern are

A. Approvals mechanisms for course & unit approvals
B. Systems issues, predominantly APDb
C. Review and maintenance of course files on SAS
D. Annual Academic Quality Review (formerly called ACR)

A. APPROVALS MECHANISMS FOR COURSE AND UNIT DATA, THROUGH FACULTY QUALITY COMMITTEES.

Context:

Approval mechanisms are fundamental to the maintenance of a quality data management system. The current process fulfils the following functions:

- Audit trails to demonstrate appropriate academic scrutiny.
- An audit trail to trace the evolution of data for the purposes of Quality Management.
- The updating of data on APDb for use in other processes.
- The provision of information to staff and students.
- Support for a responsive curriculum.

The aim of any improvements to the Approvals Process must be to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. The objectives are therefore:

a) to reduce the current high level of use of resources, both human and material
b) to render the exercise of academic judgement easier
c) to improve the levels of accuracy of stored data
d) to develop a supportive work ethos

Constraints

The Main Constraints of the Present Approvals Process:

- Difficulty in tracking agreed approvals on account of the volume of the paper records.
- Heavy use of resources – staff time at all levels; paper, reprographics, collation, distribution, meetings.
- The barrier to proper scrutiny posed by the volume of paper.
- The minority of specialists at faculty level.
- Poor communications between faculties.
- QA forms – too lengthy, too difficult to interpret, duplication of information
- Delays in entering data onto APDb caused by sheer volume of papers, limited write-access and imposed physical constraints mean that the APDb is slow to reflect reality.
- Inaccurate data entry to APDb, caused partly by difficulty in understanding the context of the QA forms.

- Inaccurate data leads to problems in other areas, and possible loss of HEFCE funding.
- Lack of sense of ownership of data (except, notably, at Carlisle Campus).
- Lack of system to verify data entry and inform data originators.
- Lack of regular cycle of data confirmation to feed into other processes.

Proposals:

- Accept that data is not static. Processes and their supporting IT systems should incorporate suitable flexibility.
- Separate "corrections" to data from "modifications" and introduce a system to verify data entry against approvals.
- Clarify what are legitimate major and minor changes, in order to make the system more responsive to change.
- Complete a major overhaul of QA documentation with the purpose of reducing paperwork, and making IT requirements more transparent.
- Redesign the approvals process so that the majority of academic decisions can be made at subject specialist level. Only pass forward new courses and collaborative provision to FQC level because of the need to secure agreement from FMG on funding.
- Redesign the approvals process for new courses to ensure that there is suitable input from admissions and a link to the Course Files.

B. SYSTEMS ISSUES, PARTICULARLY RELATING TO APDb:

Context:

The aim of maintaining course and unit data electronically must be to maintain a reference base for dependent systems. The objectives of the system are:

- To provide accurate data at suitable points in the academic cycle to inform dependant processes.
- To ensure the delivery of correct funding levels.

Constraints:

- Data on the APDb is undervalued because of the high level of perceived inaccuracy.
- Systems issues, especially versioning and the "flip" which are variously misunderstood.
- Misunderstanding about the status of information on the Web, and why it is inaccurate further reduces confidence in the APDb.
- Lack of regular training and absence of training manual or other materials on the APDb.
- A User Group which is under-used as a support mechanism.
- The difficulty of matching detailed timetabling data from Unit Descriptors to teaching requirements.
- The locking of the APDb which contributed little to improving data quality and made data confirmation and correction more difficult.

Proposals:

- Introduce a formal system for verification of APDb data.
- Attempt to eliminate as much incorrect data as possible, as soon as possible, by those who understand the context of the data.
- Separate timetabling and assignment scheduling data from the unit descriptor.

- Introduce a regular system of data confirmation, to fit in with suitable points in the academic cycle.
- Devolve write access to the APDb to match the proposed level of devolved academic scrutiny, in order to satisfy the need for ownership and understanding.
- Make APDb information officially available via the Web to enable administrative and academic staff to view the data in as near real-time as possible, to increase confidence in the data, and to allow its use for the creation of logs, course handouts, course handbooks.
- Remove all other versions of the APDb from public view and use.
- Improve training/familiarisation with APDb, produce appropriate reference documentation, paying particular attention to the understanding of versioned data (the "flip").
- Support and maintain the full functionality of the current system in order to promote the successful introduction of the new Student Record System.

C. CURRENT PROCESS FOR SYSTEMS INITIALISATION, COURSE FILES ON SAS:

Constraints:

- Inability of SAS/APDb to reflect flexible and non-standard learning patterns.
- Difficulty of completing CF forms correctly, which has been known to cause loss of funding.
- Difficulty of interpreting CF form to create correct Course File.
- Lack of sense of understanding/ownership of data.
- Lack of training for local staff to review and verify data entry.

Proposals:

- Redesign CF forms at same time as QA forms, taking especial note of how course stage/year/level information is to be displayed and entered, easing understanding of data supplied.
- Confirm existing Course Files at Faculty, School or Divisional level.
- Involve the faculty admissions team in the planning of courses, so that Course Files can be set up early if necessary, and so that there is a broader understanding of the proposals.
- Retain responsibility for Course Files at present level where the expertise is currently concentrated because of implications for funding, collaborative ventures, admissions and new developments in distance and remote learning.
- Support and maintain the full functionality of the current system.

D. CURRENT PROCEDURES FOR DATA CONFIRMATION AND ANNUAL ACADEMIC REVIEW:

Constraints:

- Any recommendations for improving courses/units cannot be implemented in the following academic year. In the worst case there is a delay of two whole years.
- There is no direct link between delivery review and data confirmation.
- Locking of APDb has made data confirmation and review less effective

Proposals:

- Annual Academic Review should be separated from data confirmation.

- The timescales for the Review should be revised to dovetail into the administrative cycle to permit a more flexible response.
- Further recommendations should be the remit of the QEU unit.

Conclusions:

There are two main problems associated with Course and Unit Data. The first one is the cumbersome approvals process. This creates unacceptable difficulties for staff. Attempts are regularly being made to confront and constrain an unwieldy and unfriendly process. Proposals to streamline the documentation and to devolve academic scrutiny and IT access should enhance the Quality Approvals process. The second is the difficulty the two current IT systems have in reconciling their data with each other and the actual course delivery patterns.. This problem should be resolved by replacement of the systems. Thus there will no longer be a conflict between the Course Files on the SAS and the Course Structures on the APDb. The replacement system will only need to record the required information once, and should be designed to deal with flexible programmes. An added functionality would be the ability to track the Approvals life cycle. Thus future progress should be possible on both the major problems, assisting as opposed to hindering the administrative effort.

FEES SETTING AND COLLECTION

Context

The area of "Fees" has been divided into two sections: Fees Setting, ie the recording of fees against individual courses, and Fees Collection. These processes are different to others within the scope of the project in that they are not under the remit of the Registrar but are owned by the Finance Department. Fees Policy, i.e. the overall rules for the level of fees to be set for different kinds of provision, is delivered by the Strategic Planning Unit and falls outside the scope of this project.

Constraints

It quickly became clear that at present there is no clear process laid down to guide the setting of tuition fees for our courses. The fees setting process is now under the remit of the Finance department, so this is a prime opportunity to agree some guidelines and procedures to ensure smooth operation in the future. The process is not linked to other processes, such as target setting and admissions so that the information is not available in a timely manner, both internally and externally. Currently, there are problems experienced every year in translating the Fees Schedule into a suitable format for use by the SAS, which has a knock on effect on enrolment. The enrolment process depends on each course, both new and continuing, having a fee set against it - no fee, no enrolments. This in turn can lead to delays in collection of revenue from sponsors, which in turn has a detrimental effect on University planning and purchasing. In relation to the collection of fees there is no consistency in the way that additional fees are charged or administered – this applies both to materials charges and to resit fees.

Proposals

Fees Setting

- **Data collection and confirmation**
  A clear, practical process should be designed by Finance; there needs to be a different process for different "sorts" of fees, but consistent across faculties: this should be implemented for the next academic year (2000/2001):

  The fee setting process is currently encompassing two areas: Confirmation that the course is running and what the fee should be. **It is suggested that the target setting exercise should be used as a trigger for the confirmation of courses and Faculties would only be asked to set fees for those courses that there is some discretion over.**

- **Documentation**
  It is recommended that the fees matrix and the fees schedule should be same document. There is clearly a great deal of work involved in transposing the detail of the fees schedule onto the fees matrix and then having to contact Faculties in order to fill in "gaps". Current fee information should be available on the WEB. It needs to be acknowledged that this data will change for valid reasons and that fee information should be published in a way that allows change to be reflected.

- **Timing**
  Fees setting and target setting deadlines to appear on the Schedules of Key Dates: dates will need to be agreed with Strategic Planning Unit and Finance as to which information is required when and then these dates should be communicated to Academic Programme Administration to be included on the schedule.

Fees Collection

- **Collaborative Ventures**
  Finance should identify a better process for collaborative ventures in conjunction with the Collaborative Ventures Unit. The current system of individual internal orders and manual invoices is unwieldy and difficult for School staff to administer effectively.

- **Security issues**
  There is evidence of several different practices being undertaken in relation to cash collection, both at enrolment and at other times of year. The proposal to have Finance staff available in each building at enrolment time is supported as there is evidence of administrative staff being given large amounts of cash at enrolment sessions and then having to complete the session with this cash held in an insecure manner.
  It is suggested that either consideration be given to all cash payments being handled by the Cash Office (this would obviously have implications for campuses at Coach Lane, Carlisle and Longhirst) or that facilities are provided for those offices which need to take cash on a regular basis.

- **Alternative payment methods for students to pay**:
  Consideration needs to be given to alternative ways for students to pay in the future – ie discount schemes, incentives for early payment

Conclusion

It is clear that there is currently no clear, consistent easily understood process in relation to the areas of Fees setting and Fees collection. Although the Finance department owns this process it is necessary for Faculty staff to become involved with the process in order for the Finance department to be able to process and collect fees effectively and efficiently. This is obviously an area of critical importance for the University in that it has a direct influence on cash flow.

The key proposal is therefore that this process now needs to be developed and all staff who interact with this process need to clearly understand the implications of what is required.

Access to current fee data should be available on the WEB for current and prospective students and also for staff reference, in the same way that a commercial company would publish a company price list.

ADMISSIONS

Context

It should be noted that extremely effective processes already support our Admissions systems, and that much internal good practice was identified during the course of investigations. There is stable support from all administrators involved, with UNN successfully handling 31,000 applications a year, via UCAS and direct. Major issues that emerged were the good channels of communication both internally and with external bodies, in addition to effective local teamwork and cumulative reviews of local practices year on year.

Constraints

The constraints identified fell into two categories: - process related and system related.

Process related constraints include:

- Timing of internal information feeding the admissions cycle
- Delays in receiving information at campuses other than Newcastle
- Iterative checking and logging processes connected with mandatory police checks required for some courses
- External constraints of UCAS cycle lead to high workload peaks in August and September
- In those faculties particularly reliant on Clearing to fill places, there is a high degree of reliance on the goodwill of both academic and administrative staff working long hours and weekends. No resentment about this extra effort was detected.

System related constraints include:

- The system that connects UCAS to institutions is old and obsolete – UNN will need to monitor the situation with the UCAS replacement system carefully in order to link to the replacement and take advantage of its new features.
- The planned introduction of the new UCAS system will coincide with the purchase of a new UNN student administrative system - many of the proposals should be carried forward for consideration at the implementation stage of these new systems.
- Our current systems cannot provide data capable of being merged with modern word-processing packages, leading to much duplication of work
- Current Management Information System not providing the wide range of statistical information required for admissions planning

Main Proposals and Key Recommendations

The recommendations highlight a situation where quality service is being offered despite rather than because of the IT systems at our disposal. With the advent of the MISDU project, there are high hopes in this area, added to the project of some further development of the SAS and MIS in the interim.

- Divorce Confirmation and Clearing processes by a few days to address peaks
- Maximise capabilities of telecom systems to assist with Confirmation and Clearing which form the main admissions workload peak
- Devise a system for passing forward relevant special needs facility requirements gained prior to enrolment
- Agree on university-wide service standards for admissions
- Urge UNN planning data cycles to prime admissions
- Explore further capabilities of the existing MIS to support planning and targeting for admissions
- Ensure mailmerge facilities and local reports available for admissions on introduction of replacement systems
- Track enquiries from potential applicants
- Make full use of UNN Website as free course advertising, especially for Clearing vacancies

Conclusions

The admissions process is already in tune with the Key Observations and General Principles listed earlier – those involved take responsibility for the process in its entirety, and there is a clear and consistent understanding of administrative and academic responsibilities. There is a culture of 'right first time' and the extensive good practice should be continued and extended.

There are some interesting challenges in the pipeline, both in connection with the introduction of new systems and in relation to external issues such as:

- Data protection
- Post 16 Curriculum
- New Tariff points system
- Service auditing

UNN is sure to rise to the challenge.

Investigating the current situation regarding UNN admissions was both interesting and enjoyable; we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted.

ENROLMENT

Context

Enrolment is the process where the student checks all personal details and provides information such as fee payer whilst signing to abide by the rules and regulations set down by the University for that academic year. There are a variety of different ways that the enrolment of students is carried out. These do not appear to depend on which Faculty owns the course, but rather on the individual practices that have built up over time within the academic induction process. Generally, first year students are enrolled at the beginning of the 'Freshers Week' and full-time continuing students at the end of that week. The main exceptions to this are for some part-time students, placement students and PGR students where enrolment is usually carried out by post.

The Enrolment Form is a UNN A3 carbon multi-part form which contains boxes to capture the information required at enrolment. At all times it is desirable to have a pre-printed form, created by either drawing information from the admissions system or from the progressed student record from a previous year. In most cases it is the administrative staff that instruct the students, either in person or by letter, on how to complete their enrolment form and check the accompanying documents. The information gathered by the enrolment form is subsequently entered onto the Student Administrative System (SAS) and the data used for Statutory Returns to external bodies as well as for internal purposes such as course & unit records, management information and fee collection.

Constraints

Enrolment represents one of the highest administrative workload peaks in the academic year, trying to enrol all students in one week and input all data, whilst carrying out the usual day-to-day duties in support of academic staff and students. At the same time continuing students do not like to return before teaching starts as they now usually need to work for as much of the summer period as possible.

Enrolment preparation is complicated by the documents to be handed out to students arriving in 'dribs and drabs' with some of it being delivered very late and staff unsure whether they have a complete set. A considerable administrative workload is involved in ensuring that all students enrolling have pre-printed forms which involves transferring students from admissions, transferring students after progression boards, ensuring all data on SAS is complete and correct and then sorting into courses alphabetically and by stage.

Fee splits and sponsor details are not always entered correctly by faculty staff, therefore finance staff check carbon copies of all forms, and make necessary amendments, which represents a duplication of work. Debtor information is not always available on the printed enrolment forms causing confusion as to who should not be enrolled.

Proposals

Information for Enrolment of New Students

- A booklet should be produced of information for new students regarding enrolment and sent in the Welcome packs giving clear reasons for enrolment, what happens, what students need to bring with them etc. This should include the Finance information on Student Loans, LEAs, paying of fees etc.
- Information packs should be introduced, listing and containing all the documents that new students need to be given at Enrolment

Preparation for Enrolment of New Students

- As early as possible, from a pre-determined date, applicant's information should be transferred from the admissions process to enable enrolment forms to be printed out and sorted in advance

- Sufficient blank forms should be available to allow for emergency situations, along side guidance to Faculty staff on system administration and information on the importance of entering data on the SAS so that a replacement form can be printed out over night.

Suggestions for New Student Enrolment Sessions

- It is advisable for the same staff to deal with the whole enrolment process for the same group of students, i.e. staff to deal with both the paper enrolment as well as the data input. Academics should not be specifically involved with enrolment
- To aid the improvement of classroom/course based enrolment sessions, enrolment should link in an organised way to Induction and be held in such a way as to prevent queues by using several desks split alphabetically by student surname.
- There is a natural maximum for a classroom based enrolment session (approximately 50 students). Over this number it is advisable to organise drop-in sessions to prevent the paper process from being long-winded and boring for students.

Long Term Suggestions For Enrolment of New Students

- For new students it would be desirable to enrol them 'On-line' - having the student in front of you whilst data input is carried out. There would be no time delay for data input with this system. A new system could then produce an admissions slip, via a local printer, on high quality paper for students to take away from the enrolment session.

Short Term Suggestions for Enrolment of Continuing Students

- Enrolment forms for all continuing students should be printed out after the July Progression Boards regardless of any need to be considered at the Resit Board and posted out to permanent home addresses for completion and return.
- When sending postal enrolments clear guidelines should accompany the forms and point out the urgency of these being returned immediately. The admissions part of the form should not be left attached; this can be sent or collected afterwards as evidence of enrolment having been officially completed.

Long Term Suggestions for Enrolment of Continuing Students

- With the introduction of new technology it may be possible to enrol students over the Web via a tailored Portal, which would mean that the data would be more accurate as the students would be entering their own personal details. This could include confirmation of finance details, units to be studied, as well as proof of their having received University regulations.

Suggestions Concerning Finance at Enrolment

- Finance should be available, even if in just one room per building during the enrolment week and Coach Lane Campus requires more than one hour each day for students to access their cheques from Student Loan Company.
- To prevent duplication of work by Finance in re-entering sponsor information and amending fee splits on the SAS it is recommended that Finance agree to take responsibility for this information.
- A Key System Date needs to be identified for student debtor information to be added electronically to the SAS prior to the enrolment forms being printed. It has been agreed in principle that Finance will be responsible for this entry.

Short Term Suggestions for Enrolment Forms

- New fields on the enrolment form such as e-mail addresses, mobile phone numbers etc. need to be included.
- The present enrolment form could be easily adapted to provide a more substantial admission slip section of a heavier grade paper.
- In order to send the present enrolment form through the post to continuing students, without the admissions slip, the place for the student to sign needs to be moved from the admissions part of the form to the enrolment section.

Long Term Suggestions for Enrolment Forms

- Staff have requested that enrolment forms print locally and any new system should make this possible.
- There are excellent examples available of completely different formats for enrolment forms that would aid the process of postal enrolment.
- The admissions slip for continuing students should be printed out after the data entry of enrolment and could be similar to the present separate Council Tax Form. Technology is available for this now.
- Longer term, enrolment could be over the Web or 'on-line' with an admissions slip printed out on quality paper with Council Tax exemption with laminated, wallet sized, cards for evidence of enrolment.
- 'New style' admissions cards could even incorporate the library card with bar code and photograph on one side and SAS identifier, course details and computer ID on the other.

Conclusions

There are many examples of best practice in the enrolment of new students but also opportunities to improve the process of enrolment in several ways. Short-term improvements could be adopted around areas such as linking enrolment to Induction Programmes, and organising sessions with desk splits to reduce the number of students queuing at one desk. Information to new students could be improved both by what is sent to them in the Welcome Pack to inform them of enrolment procedure and what is expected of them, as well as how information is given to them as they enrol. With the development of new technology and the imminent purchase of a new system, enrolment of new students could be 'On Line' enrolment sessions, face-to-face with an administrator entering their personal details. This would give the advantage of 'right first time' and instantaneous Management Information.

Enrolment of continuing students being by post over the summer will allow staff to concentrate on dealing with new students, direct entrants and any problems with overseas students. This will lessen the stress on staff involved in enrolling all students at the same time, but ensures that the data is collated on the SAS early for Management Information and Statutory Returns. Success of postal enrolment for continuing students requires amendments to the enrolment form. The admissions slips will only be given to students who are eligible for enrolment i.e. those who are pass/proceed, not owing fees/accommodation and who have completed their enrolment form satisfactorily.

It has been agreed in principle that Finance staff enter the fee information and sponsor details onto the SAS using the carbon copy of the enrolment form. This will prevent duplication of work and hopefully achieve a 'right first time' result.

Long term, continuing students should be able to access their own records 'On Line' via the Web and enrol whilst confirming/altering their personal data. An admissions slip as evidence of enrolment would be produced only once all the predetermined conditions had been met. Proposals for future admissions' documents incorporate a detachable credit-card-sized card for students to keep in their wallets and could be combined with library cards to prevent duplication. This idea could be further developed to incorporate a swipe card for access to buildings and technology rooms, as well as, photographs to prevent fraud.

STUDENT OPTION CHOICE

Context

Courses studied by students at UNN encompass to a greater or lesser extent the requirement of students to take units that are non-mandatory within a particular timeframe. These are option units. This section of the report looks at the process by which it becomes known that a student intends to study or is studying particular option units.

Current processes and deadlines surrounding student option choice are built around the requirements to have student option choice data confirmed at the end of April, in order to feed this in to the production of the teaching timetable at the start of May. Coupled with this was the “locking” of the APD in terms of courses, unit content of courses, and teaching content of units from April 1999.

This snapshot of option choice data has been unreliable for the production of a student-based timetable, since:

- many students (or cohorts of students) failed to select options to these timescales
- students progressed on their course in unpredicted ways (invalidating that choice)
- students simply changed (and were allowed to change) option choices.

In short, inaccuracy in the recording of student-unit registrations has manifested itself in problems in the information for:

- the teaching timetable
- the SDEB and PAB process
- funding returns
- internal budget allocations
- the examination timetable

Constraints

Major themes from the current situation are:

- Many areas of the University feel that it is too early to ask students to choose options during semester two for teaching in the following academic session. Some parts of the university do not require this information in order to produce a teaching timetable
- Many students progress in ways that mean that the option choice that they make needs to be revised (i.e. there is change of option), and the current systems are geared to the assumption that option choice change is by exception
- Many students have choice about non-mandatory units when they are first year or direct entrants
- Considerable effort expended in the production of packs for students
- Problems in confirming if students will be progressing on a "language option"
- Difficulties in confirming option requirements within the timetable if departments choose not to ask students about options. This is worse when the department that requires a service option is not electronically timetabled.
- Even after teaching starts, students may change the "unit" that they are studying
- Use of Modern Language "Dummy Units". No-one takes responsibility to audit which students are attached to these and review which units they should be attached to (leading to problems on the MRS)
- Local Databases are used to allocate student option choice (replacing the old "electives ballot" system, but it is felt that these allocations are not ballot based)
- Local Databases are being used to maintain details of students attending units further to SAS data
- The practice of confirming with the student the student-unit registrations at enrolment is not systematic

Proposals

A summary of the key recommendations is presented as:

- Mechanisms for communicating with students
- Proactive auditing of student - unit registration record
- Clarification of changes to dummy units and "Cross Faculty" Units
- Clarification that local databases assist allocation but should not record unit registrations
- Clearer information from (and easier access to) the Academic Programme Database
- Clearer process and form for sanctioning change of option choices. Communication of the process to students and staff
- Provision of option “rules” to be basis of information for timetabling
- Clear UNN wide option choice process
- Enrolment used as a key point for confirming the student-unit registration
- Student responsibility for their own data (in preparation for new system)
- Web Based Option Choice (with new student system or Learning Portal)

Conclusion

The key theme emerging from discussions with staff regarding the option choice process (and the recording of student-unit registrations on the SAS and MRS) was the sense in which administrative staff felt that is was their responsibility to ensure that students chose options. It was their responsibility to ensure that students were doing the correct units, to find out when students changed options, and ultimately it was their ‘fault’ if a students unit profile was incorrect at an examination board. This is one area where the interface between administrative and academic responsibility became very stark.

These recommendations are geared towards taking reasonable administrative steps to ensure data is captured, checked and capable of being updated by the identification of points at which option choices should be made and confirmed, and setting out the change process. Beyond this, cultural change is required of administrative staff, academic staff and students to take appropriate responsibility for data that forms a key theme of a more devolved information system.

TEACHING TIMETABLE

Context

There are currently two clear models across the University regarding timetabling. These have evolved over time according to both the internal structure and culture and the course complexity of the relevant faculties.

Those faculties with little fluctuation in target figures currently timetable using these, and ignore the detailed real student data. These courses tend to have minimal or predictable option choice; in general, academics provide set timetables on paper, and the Timetabler seeks to recreate these within the Scientia timetabling software system.

Those faculties with a higher degree of fluctuation and more complex option choice find it is best handled by the inclusion of the actual student data. Here a timetable is created based on 'best fit' for the majority of courses, with the exception of predefined part time slots.

Constraints

There emerged two specific areas comprising the majority of the time involved creating a timetable:

- Quality of initial information (downloads/planning)
- Iteration process

The Timetablers themselves had no control over the problems identified. In effect, what appeared to be happening was a 'fire fighting' exercise during the entire process. Across the University, the major issues that emerged were:

- **Fluctuating/incorrect targets**
- **Difficulties obtaining staff allocations for units**
- **Not being advised of potential problems/constraints until late in the process**
- **Cross faculty information unavailable, or constraints missing or incorrect**
- **Conflict between academics constraining the timetable for local/personal reasons**
- **Previously unidentified problems with original download of data from SAS/APDb**
- **Notifications of students changing option choice has knock on effects for the whole timetable**
- **Churn in course registration (i.e. transferral to non-honours or another degree)**

Extracts are currently taken from the SAS (students), the APDb (course structures) and the previous version of the timetable system (staff/locations/templates etc). These are taken at the commencement of the process, and are a 'snapshot' at that moment in time. They are not updated by any further extracts. This appears to be the biggest problem. One of the most time consuming exercises undertaken by the Timetablers is the checking of this information

Proposals

- **Create a Predictable Timetable**

  That UNN work towards having a more predictable timetable. To clarify 'predictable', the intention would be, where possible, to keep the bulk of core units to the same time in the week. Staff and locations, as resources, should be open to change. It is recognised there would have to be additions/deletions as a result of intake figures. Also, it may be difficult to maintain continuity on certain option units. However, some

courses without options and with static intake would benefit greatly. Over time it is perceived a 'best fit' timetable would emerge.

Students would be able to plan part time work around their timetable. Academics would be able to plan around the bulk of theirs. Also, construction of the timetable would be able to commence at an earlier date, as a 'shell' of the timetable would already be available. This should result in a more streamlined and speedier process.

- **Timetable to be Available End of June**

That UNN works towards a completed timetable at the end of June. This would ensure the availability of timetables prior to the summer vacation. With this knowledge in advance, part time student work could be planned around, and staff would know their commitments for the forthcoming year. This would also eliminate any last minute 'panic' situations, which are common currently.

- **Clarification of Iterations and Constraints**

Clarification and agreement needs to be outlined on both the level and timing of iteration and constraints. Once clarified this must be supported by senior academic and administrative managers both in the Faculties and University wide. This would streamline and shorten the timetabling process, and would be essential for the production of an early or yearlong timetable. There would be clear, documented guidelines and the process would assist in the facilitation of cross faculty timetabling.

- **Create a Year Long Timetable**

That the possibility of a yearlong timetable be investigated. This would enable staff to balance workloads throughout the year, and students to plan part time work around their classes.

- **Timetable Delivery Information Held in Scientia Software**

That the timetable delivery information is stored on Syllabus Plus instead of the APDb. This would mean the definitive version would be available and retained at the point of reference. It could also be readily updated at any time, without reliance upon other systems.

- **Full Utilisation of Teaching Week**

That there are published, recognised standard teaching times at which both staff and students may reasonably be expected to attend. An example would be 9am to 6pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm Friday.

- **Use of Single Student Sets**

To alleviate the current problems surrounding allocation of individual students to classes, the creation of 'single student sets' across the University should be adopted. Class sizes would be more regulated, and class lists more reliable. The handling of option changes would be better managed and less time consuming. It should be to the discretion of the faculty whether this was adopted for all students (i.e. not necessarily applicable for first years or where 'real students' are not used). It should, however, be compulsory where students are on a course that has any cross faculty unit, for ease of use by the customer faculty. It seems likely at this stage that a new Student Administration System may well force us down this route.

- **Timely, Accurate Planning Targets**

Timely, accurate planning targets are provided. This would give us the ability to provide both an early timetable, and a yearlong timetable. Without them, neither can

be adequately produced. It is recognised that there would need to be an overestimation in the majority of cases. However, this is preferable to attempting to insert new activities into an already established timetable.

Conclusions

A major theme from all the discussions on this topic was one of culture within the University. To successfully implement any of the recommendations, a serious review and change of culture would be required. Certain ideas, such as trying to clarify and lessen the iteration period are not new, and are commonly believed to occur currently. However, the varying degree to which this works is directly related to the level of senior support provided in the faculty.

It is clear that the ideal situation would be **a yearlong predictable timetable, available at the end of June, with a clear iteration process and predefined constraints highlighted.** Whether this is wholly viable has still to be determined. It was not possible within the time constraints of this Project to test certain theories and system specifications. It is strongly suggested that these be undertaken prior to any major change of process. Due to the varying course complexities experienced within the different faculties, no one single method for compilation is suggested. Both existing models could take up creating single student sets. Those wishing to continue using actual students could do so, whilst the others could ignore that section of data as currently. The timetable data should be stored on Scientia as the definitive version.

Certain of the recommendations can stand alone in their implementation, whilst some are reliant on others in order to be successful. These relationships, as laid out in the Final chapter 'Conclusions and Implementation Issues', should be borne in mind when considering the report.

Decisions regarding the way forward for Timetabling within the University also need to be taken at a high level. An expectation of a stable, early timetable is unreasonable when faced with changing goalposts and intake. An early, stable timetable may involve drastically changing the way we currently handle student choice, and involve a considerable change in culture.

ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESSION

The consideration of Assessment and Progression led to the distinction of four clear areas:

A. THE GENERAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Context

The introduction of Unitisation, with the corresponding development of two-tier exam boards and the Marks Recording System (MRS), has resulted in a significant increase in administrative responsibility and workload with regard to assessment. Administrative staff play a central role in the operation of the MRS, and have assumed significant responsibility for the chasing and verification of marks and their accurate presentation at exam boards. There is a real sense in which, because of the limited physical access to the MRS, administrative rather than academic staff actually 'own' the marks.

It is also clear that while there are common processes across all Faculties with regard to assessment, nevertheless there are also significant differences in approach to the operation of SDEBs, the pre-PAB scrutiny of student profiles, and information presented to boards.

Constraints

The key current limitation of the MRS is that the system is physically limited to a relatively small number of users. Academic staff have no easy way to access the system themselves, for the entry of marks, production of UCRFs, checking of results history for their students etc. The new replacement Student System must provide such distributed and self-service facility.

The referral/deferral process represents a significant workload for administrative and academic staff. It is effectively a duplication of a semester assessment process, requiring the same operation of the MRS and exam boards.

Proposals

- **Assignment receipting**
  There is a significant administrative workload here, which is focused too much on the protection of staff from accusations of lost/missing student work. A simplified process should be put in place using either 'ballot boxes' for the collection of assignments, or e-mail 'post boxes' for the return of work directly to tutors.

- **Debtors**
  The current situation is that administrative staff incur significant work and responsibility within the assessment process for managing debtors. A new process for the handling of debtors should be put in place, to be the responsibility of the Finance Dept.

- **Referrals/Deferrals**
  Given the huge effort expended by the University currently, a review should be held of the academic perspective on referrals to see whether referrals can be reduced overall and whether any referral needs to be an exam.

- **The E1 Process and APDb data**
  The E1 Form process plays a key role in the early stage of confirmation of unit and assessment offerings. However, the process needs to be further refined, for example with regard to the articulation of cross-Faculty constraints where a unit is used elsewhere on a part-time course.

- **MRS Improvements**

Users would benefit greatly from two MRS improvements:

i. A PAB report is proposed which would display each student on a single line of text in rank order (and therefore many students to a page) – i.e. which would *look* like a spreadsheet but is not actually a spreadsheet created by the MRS.
ii. It is proposed that the student mark is automatically updated to 40 on entry of the C (condone) code.

- **Results Distribution**
  The reality of result distribution is that very few students use public notice boards and most rely on postings. The standard practice should therefore be a posting out of results on the third working day following the deadline for public display of pass lists. Pass lists would be produced and displayed as normal.

- **Clarification Of Administrative And Academic Roles And Responsibilities**

There is an obvious need to define very clearly the administrative role and responsibility in providing accurate assessment data to exam boards. Each Faculty should produce a clear set of guidelines for administrative and academic staff regarding their roles and responsibilities within the whole assessment process.

- **Other Recommendations**
  - Administrative staff should be allowed to give publicly available results to students by telephone, but may choose to refer more difficult situations to academic colleagues.
  - Progress and exit codes need to be reviewed and amended/clarified as appropriate..
  - Production of post-PAB reports as a checking/recording mechanism is not necessary.
  - Implications for the MRS of PABs meeting more than once per year need to be clarified (e.g. production of PABRs, SURFs, and the recording of definitive marks).
  - The SURF wording needs to be amended to further clarify the status of marks.

B. PERSONAL EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Context and Constraints

There are significant differences in approach to PECs across the Faculties. Some of this is due to administrative and management 'style', and some to differences in staff-student relationships (personal tutor system being more or less effective etc.). However, a large part of the variation is due simply to different interpretation of the principles involved and different applications of the process. The PECs process is clearly related to the process for approval of late submissions, but this relationship seems now to be well understood (after several years in practice).

Proposals

- **Effect on performance or effect on person?**
  At present both approaches are used within UNN. A review of the PECs process should be held from the academic perspective in order to decide whether or not both an "effect on person" and an "effect on performance" approach should be retained

- **Consistency of PECs Judgements**
  Currently, the same PECs claim can lead to different outcomes depending on the Faculty. A review of the PECs process from the academic perspective should also clarify whether or not there should be consistency of approach and decision across UNN.

- **Involvement of Tutor**
  Different practices currently exist with regard to the collection of tutor comments on the PECs claim. In some instances the student him/herself may be returning the tutor form (and thus be seeing the tutor comments). Students should not be asked/allowed to return Tutor forms.

- **PECs information**
  There is no 'advertising' of PECs as such, other than posters clarifying deadlines for submission of claims, but there are differences in course handbook information. The Registrar's Dept. should therefore produce a standard section on PECs for use in Course Handbooks and the Partnership in Learning booklet. The CATS office should also produce a handbook for CATS students, containing both PECs and LAs information.

- **Recording of PECs data**
  Both NBS and Arts have (Access) databases, which provide good examples of how PECs can be logged and tracked. However, little systematic analysis of PECs claims is undertaken. A standard set of information should be defined for the annual review of the PECs process (global numbers, by unit, by course etc.), and the existing databases should be investigated to see whether or not they can be used by Faculties.

- **Carry forward of PECs**
  Many PECs claims result in the need for consideration to be carried forward to the year in which a final award decision is made. This is very problematic given the current MRS functionality. There should be developed a 'carry forward' flag on the MRS. Also, the SURF should include a general statement to the effect that all submitted PECs claims have been taken into account.

- **Storage of Confidential PECs claims**
  At present the PECs claims are held in different ways, some in locked cabinets, some in sealed envelopes in the student file. The implications of recent changes in data protection legislation for the storage of PECs claims needs to be clarified.

C. CONFERMENT

Context and Constraints

The conferment process is closely associated with preparation for Congregations (the latter was not included in the scope of this project). The conferment process depends entirely upon the 1997 ISD produced (written in Access) Certificate Printing System (CPS). This system resides in the Student Admin section of the Registrar's Dept.

Proposals

- **Checking Of Pass Lists**
  The comparison between MRS and CPS pass lists should not be necessary if Faculties understand the effect on parchment production of late/incorrect MRS and SAS data.

- **Student Names**
  The parchment is the only place that contains names in this particular order, - all other systems contain names by surname first in alphabetical order. Faculty staff should utilise existing SAS reports at an appropriate pre-exam board date to check all student names in the form they would appear on the parchment.

- **Data Confirmation**
  This data confirmation exercise happens very early, in December, and is driven by the need for information re: the Congregations rather than the CPS. Only a small

percentage of changes happen to the previous years data, and new/changed course data can be input to the CPS very quickly. This data collection exercise should be separated from the Congregations process and should either be undertaken at a much later date or not held at all (i.e. simply inputting changes to last years data as MRS pass lists are received).

- **Distribution Of Parchments**
  There is currently redundant checking and multi-handling of parchments. Student Admin pass (and log) the finished parchments to Faculties for distribution. Faculties do not distribute them in a personal way, but usually simply post them out. The Student Admin office should send out parchments to students directly.

- **Students Not On SAS**
  There are areas of the University where students are not on the SAS, the key example being HSWE PIMS students. The production of parchments for such students is therefore an entirely manual business, using the old Word for Windows templates. No checking of conferment data is possible, as there is no link to the SAS. Such parchments should be produced locally as necessary, with the Student Admin section retaining overall control of security of blank parchments.

- **Course Titles: Multiple Exit Awards**
  SAS and CPS are structured on the notion of a single award title being associated with a single course code. This is increasingly a limitation upon academic structures where, for example, courses are being designed with several pathway options or several named language options. There is also the problem of varying exit awards for the one course, e.g. a student exiting a teacher-training course without QTS. The SAS cannot be amended to contain more than one title per course code and course codes should not simply be proliferated in order to better reflect academic structures (consequent problems of student transfers and MRS tracking). So the CPS should be developed in order that it contains the definitive record of what award was actually conferred upon the student (rather than the normal course exit award).

- **Course Titles: Variations In Wording**
  A second problem relating to course titles is that the SAS title is sometimes not the title that should appear on the parchment. For example, the title has been used to indicate delivery of a course at a remote site. At present the CPS is being used to reconcile the SAS title (which is subsequently the MRS pass list title) with the actual award title on the parchment. These should always be the same. All SAS titles should be checked and confirmed as being the title which will appear on the parchment (other than for one-off situations such as non-QTS or levels of course structure flexibility which necessitates various exit titles).

- **SAS Data Input To CPS**
  SAS data should be taken as a single download rather than on a course by course basis.

- **Simple Process Improvements**
  - Simplify the “Pass List header sheet” by removing unnecessary signatures and details.
  - Use e-mail for notification of MRS pass list problems rather than the hard-copy “Pass List Amendments Sheet”.
  - An automatic embossing machine should be purchased.

D. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER SCHEME

Context and Constraints

All CATS students are currently dealt with by generic course codes which categorise the student either as ‘registered’ or ‘enrolled’, with full-time or part-time attendance. The

maintenance of accurate records for such students is very difficult because of split and confused responsibilities between the CATS office and Faculty staff.

Proposals

- **Registration of CATS Students**
  CATS should not be registering students on standard existing programmes.

- **Changes to CATS Registered Programmes**
  CATS and Faculty staff need to clarify communications with regard to any changes concerning a registered student programme. Such changes can be undertaken locally or centrally, but must be done by the correct process of amending SAS course structures rather than direct changes to the MRS.

- **CATS Enrolled Students**

CATS enrolled students should be entirely under the control of local faculty staff. Faculty staff should have generic course codes and enrol students locally on such programmes (often repeats or trailing) and therefore be in full control of the production of PABRs.

Conclusions

The assessment process at UNN has evolved rapidly since the introduction of Unitisation. The current administrative support needs to deal with variations in approach and curricular structure (year-long units, complex option choices, flexible delivery and progression). Some of the above recommendations suggest a clarification of academic approach in key areas of assessment, and there is an underlying need for clarification of the various roles and responsibilities of academic and administrative staff.

EXAMINATION TIMETABLING

Context

Each academic session three examination timetables are produced for unitised courses, at the end of semester one, semester two and for resit examinations. The examination timetable is produced using the Scientia Examination Scheduler, a piece of software that is similar to that used for the teaching timetable (Course Planner), but which is standalone (as opposed to running on the "Scheduling Database") and located within Registrars Department.

The "E1" procedure and forms that existed before unitisation have been modified to deliver information on the examination content of units. This data is entered onto an "E1 Database" and then merged with data from the SAS to establish the requirement of students to take examinations, and it is this data that is loaded (via the Scientia "universal exchange format") into the scheduling system.

The production of the Examination Timetable then involves iterations between Registrars Department and Faculties on spreadsheets that add rooms and Invigilators outside of the Scientia system.

Constraints

Major themes from the current situation were

- Under - utilisation of the Scientia system due to the problems that we have in recording student - unit registrations on the SAS
- Special Needs information needs be collected and confirmed in a more systematic way and be more consistent between faculties
- Need to share best practice in terms of sharing / tweaking stationery that is used in the examination, incident reporting, additional instructions that are given to Invigilators
- Could the examination timetable be the same “year on year”
- Investigation of how much E1 data changes year on year, or semester on semester.
- Recruitment and training of Invigilators
- Budgets are a problem for Carlisle

Proposals

A summary of key recommendations is presented as

- E1 forms to be produced for a) units that have an examination and b) have students on them
- E1 forms to include past examination information
- E1 forms to include lists (course numbers) of students on the unit
- Clarify relationship between SAS and Examination student-unit registrations
- Establish (with student disability officer) process for collecting and storing special needs requirements of students
- Revised training for Invigilators
- Review budgets for Carlisle accommodation
- Roll out best practice for examination administration
- Utilisation of other Scientia facilities (room allocation, etc) dependent upon more accurate student-unit registrations
- "Roll Forward" or pre-publish examination timetable

Conclusion

The examination timetabling process has been reviewed semester on semester for the last two years and has been modified to take account of best practice. While the reasons for the E1 phase of the process might be questioned (in so far that it may be considered part of the "unit" information), it is clear that this plays a key role in asking for the validation of this information from academic staff. To move away from this would require considerable confidence in the "definitive" record of a unit.

The current process has much scope for improvement once the data inputs from the SAS are made much more reliable. Recommendations to achieve this have been put forward under the "option choices" section. Beyond this, considerable testing of the ability of the Scientia system(s) to handle the booking of examinations, rooms, staff and students will be required.

IT SYSTEMS ISSUES & ANNUAL DATA FLOWS

Context

Although not originally defined as a separate area for investigation within this project, it quickly became obvious from work undertaken in several other areas that an overview of systems issues and general data flows was essential.

Constraints

The current systems have been developed year by year but still have key deficiencies that are inherent to their technology and design. The main limitations are –

- Limited access for users
- Complex inter-relationship of systems
- Lack of systematic training/support
- Unsophisticated approach to deadlines and data

Proposals

- **Introduction of the concept of Key System Dates**
  The term 'deadline' should be entirely replaced by the more positive concept of "Key System Dates" (KSDs), the date at which certain data is to be used for another process. The reasons for and the benefits to be gained from that subsequent process will be made very clear to users, as will the consequences of missing the KSD or providing partial or incorrect data. But the KSD will stand and the operation of subsequent processes will continue as scheduled. The KSD approach makes the 'locking' of systems irrelevant.

- **Separation out of course and unit data sets**
  Data should be confirmed/checked only when needed for subsequent processes. Data held in the Unit Descriptor is currently used for several different processes but is confirmed, together with course structures and related data, at a single point in the annual cycle. It is recommended therefore that four key data sets relating to course and unit data be separated out. The annual schedule of data flows can then also separate out several KSDs in relation to them.

- **Revision of the annual cycle of data flows**
  In addition to the separation out of data sets, several recommendations from other areas of the project allow a major revision of the annual cycle of data flows which more evenly spreads administrative workload.

  - From Timetabling: the possibility to provide a definitive timetable for the next semester (or year) by the end of June.
  - From Enrolment: the opportunity to introduce an altered enrolment process for continuing students, - to take place July/August.
  - From Options: the opportunity to introduce an altered option choice process for continuing students, - to take place July/August.
  - From Course & Unit Data: the need to develop a clear annual process of data confirmation/preparation which is separate from (but linked to) AAQR.

- **Improved Training**
  It is a reasonable expectation that all staff will be provided with the appropriate training and technical support to enable them to work effectively and efficiently. The desirability of training increases with the growth in access to the systems. Accuracy and timeliness is improved when staff understand the need for data, the link to the relevant processes for its creation and subsequent use and the benefits which accrue from the successful conclusion of such processes. System users need to be

supported at all points in the annual cycle of data flows. Use of systems is not constant but the centrally provided support function should be.

- **The APDb must be available via the Web**
  The APDb should be available on the Web in as near real-time as possible. The existing extracts should then be removed. This will enable a wider and more confident readership of the data, the wider use of the material for the construction of logs, Course Guides and handouts, a greater sense of ownership and relevance over the existing data and should lead to improved data quality.

Conclusions

It is likely that the current legacy systems will be in place for at least a further two academic years before the introduction of a new replacement Student System. The recommendations made above are vital in allowing the University to cope with this interim period and to ensure that staff can handle necessary processes more effectively. It will also be important in getting data into as accurate a form as possible for migration to a new system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – CONCLUSIONS

The most encouraging aspect of the team's investigations has been the range of Good Practice that has been uncovered. Many of the recommendations that have been made come directly from the stakeholders. Some may seem obvious and have been suggested in the past but there has not been the impetus to effect the change. The hope is that as these are now all packaged together in one report more weight will given to them.

This project generated over a hundred recommendations over all the functional areas examined, the full details of which appear in the body of the main report. The project team have considered all of the recommendations against criteria for implementation:- which staff will implement and who will be affected; whether implementation can be immediate or whether there are resource implications; whether the change is a systems change or purely process; as well as whether the proposed changes affect the academic calendar and the time of year in which the work is carried out.

It is impossible to specify and purchase a new Student System for the University without a full understanding of the current processes. Further work will need to be done within MISDU to ensure that (a) the academic perspective is equally well understood and (b) that those areas of the University which have significant differences are properly represented within the processes (eg HSWE, Law). It will also be necessary to do some work on the student perspective when considering the new "self-service" culture which it is hoped will be facilitated by a new system.

The purpose of the project was to determine improved process models for student administration processes, ensuring we operate in the most efficient and effective ways to meet both internal and external requirements. We feel we attained this objective with the assistance of numerous colleagues. The legacy of the project is therefore twofold: -

1. In the next two years, our short-term recommendations should safeguard the integrity of existing data and smooth some of the loftiest peaks of the administrative calendar.
2. In the longer term, we entrust the main report and supporting literature to the MISDU project team in order that they are fully appraised of our aspirations regarding the capabilities of the replacement enterprise-wide computer systems that they purchase on behalf of UNN.

The team would like to thank all the stakeholders who participated in the consultation and who found time for the team within their busy workloads. Staff were happy to share their good practice and the less positive aspects of their work in order for the team to gain a full picture of how processes operate in different parts of the University.

Michael Armstrong
Melinda Cook
Madeline Giles
Jessica Greenlees
Sarah Gwilliam
Angela McNeill
David Morgan

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