



NUIG builds integrated IS function using ITIL best practice to deliver effective services & improve customer experience

With public sector spending drastically reduced, and many organisations facing hiring freezes, 3rd level institutions need to look at how best to get value from the resources they already have. While some public sector CIOs are focused on slashing costs, forward-thinking organisations are also taking the opportunity to find ways to ensure quality and even improve services.

Established in 1845 as Queen's College Galway, NUI Galway (NUIG) is one of Ireland's foremost centres of academic excellence. With over 15,000 students, it has a long established reputation of teaching and research excellence in each of its seven faculties - Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering, Celtic Studies, Medicine & Health Sciences, and Law. The Sunday Times University Guide has named it Irish University of the Year 4 out of the past 6 years and a €400 million project is underway to develop the university into a "campus of the future".

The staff of the various technical departments at NUIG have always strived to provide the best quality services for their customer base. Serving 15,000 students along with academic, administration and research staff has often presented challenges. In order to focus on specialised services for different customer areas, several IT departments evolved independently from each other over the years. While this meant that each department could focus on the needs of its own customers, over time the university began to recognise that it was missing out on opportunities to share resources, knowledge and experience.

New ways of thinking

The appointment of a new IT Director combined with an awareness of evolving service management practices within the industry inspired a new way of thinking. Operating under new leadership, and ready for change, the two largest technical departments agreed that a merger could provide many benefits both for their staff and for the customers they serve. The challenge would be structuring their combined services in such a way that they would meet the needs of the University while operating within a reduced budget structure.

At the same time, the service culture in the organisation was shifting away from supporting technology to delivering customer focused services. NUIG management knew that the key to success would be in moving away from technical activity as services to a holistic, team-driven approach to service delivery.

The integration of the Computer Services & MIS departments represented a significant opportunity for a program of change

NUIG recognised that in addition to pooling available resources, the merger would provide them with the opportunity to introduce a new vision and service management culture and deliver greater efficiencies in work practices. But in order to realise these benefits they needed the mechanisms both for providing better service and measuring the results. ITIL, a set of methodologies for delivering effective IT services drawn from industry best practice, would provide this framework.

NUIG recruited ESMI, the market leader in effective service management, to recommend and drive targeted improvements to the service culture

While the experience and commitment of the long-serving staff was recognised as a key strength of the organisation, management knew that fresh thinking was required to move the organisation towards its new goals. ESMI had been delivering education to the IT function and had informally identified possible improvements, including integration of the IT departments, particularly the establishment of a single Service desk to improve the user experience. ESMI was engaged to perform a gap assessment of the current support environment and to provide management with a set of practical recommendations and a strategy for effecting those changes.

Its key goals were to:

- Identify key gaps in the service provision model
- Prioritise areas for improvement, producing an overarching strategy and short term plan to address gaps
- Ensure the plan incorporated Quick Wins which could be achieved as part of the process of integrating the IT departments.

Consolidated management of the environment

One of the most important elements for the success of the new IT function would be to provide NUIG's customers with a simple service structure, with a list of services organised by business activity (and not technical activity) so that customers could relate to them. ESMI helped NUIG to develop its service catalogue to meet the needs of all of its customers in a clear and concise way.

It was also recommended the establishment of service management processes in the environment. Through brainstorming sessions and workshops with staff, they guided management in designing the processes to meet both good practice industry guidelines and also the unique objectives and considerations of NUIG. The addition of the activities and tools associated with a process-based approach to service management would increase NUIG's ability to measure quality of service, effective use of resources, compliance with agreed procedures and ongoing improvements within the organisation.

One of the challenges that NUIG faced was managing its existing resources to meet the needs of the various customer bases within the organisation – students, academics, administration and research staff all had significantly different requirements. ESMI suggested that the mechanisms required to meet these requirements could be fulfilled through a single IT service Delivery organisation with consistent management structures and processes.

Historically these various customer bases had also been served by multiple local independent helpdesks representing different technical specialities within the IS departments. The manner in which these support functions had evolved independently of each other had led to inefficiencies, lost opportunities for mutual development of staff and was likely causing a fair amount of confusion and frustration for users who had to remember which desk to contact in the event of an incident, and regularly bypassed the desks when reporting issues.

It was recommended that a single, centralised Service Desk be established to represent all technical areas, service all customer types and be the single point of contact for all IS Services. This has helped to increase staff morale due to improved learning across technology areas, reduce costs by optimising the use of scarce resources, and most importantly improve the customer experience.

One major issue was the lack of ITSM management visibility. While there was a degree of monitoring and management in place there was no measurement framework and therefore no hard data to provide management with the means to make informed decisions. There was also limited, inconsistent information capture during service delivery and limited, subjective reporting on delivery criteria.

A more formal management and measurement of the process was designed and NUIG were provided with a measurement framework including guidance on critical success factors and key performance indicators in order to manage outcomes effectively.

The role of ITIL going forward

The work is "live" and ongoing. It is very much a real world solution that is continuing to add value and benefits for NUIG. Service management is ensuring NUIG is effective, efficient and economic with budget and resources for IT and the University as a whole.