Report of the Quality Review Group

to the

UL Global

Review dates	23rd to 25th May 2022
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UL QSU Website	www.ul.ie/quality
Unit Website	www.ul.ie/global/
QQI Website	www.qqi.ie

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Table of Contents

1   The UL Quality Review Process

The University of Limerick (UL) follows an established process for quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) in line with that originally developed jointly by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the latter whose functions are now carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The review process involves an approximate seven-year cycle during which each unit works to improve the quality of its programmes and services and undergoes a rigorous selfevaluation prior to a quality review by internationally recognised experts in the relevant field.

The common framework adopted by the Irish universities for their QA/QI systems is consistent with both legislative requirements and international good practice. The process itself evolved as a result of the Universities Act, 1997, in which the responsibility for QA/QI was placed directly on the individual universities. The process now complies with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, as amended by the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019*. The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) website (www.ul.ie/quality) provides details on the process.

All units are reviewed against quality assurance standards as described in the tailored quality review guidelines, which is available on the QSU website. The planned schedule of quality reviews is available on the QSU website.

The UL quality review process comprises the following three phases:

1. Pre-review phase, in which the unit under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a selfassessment report (SAR).

2. Review phase, in which a quality review group comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, visit the unit, meet with stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the QSU website.

3. Post-review phase, in which the unit considers and formally responds to the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to the University Quality Committee and UL senior management.

The recommendations made by the quality review group (QRG) form the basis of a quality improvement plan (QIP) prepared by the QSU for the unit under review. Once the site visit is over, the unit sets about evaluating and implementing the recommendations, as appropriate.

Approximately seven to nine months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Quality Committee. Committee members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 18-24 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, the Provost/Deputy President, the Vice President Global and Community Engagement and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2   Summary Details of UL Global

Established in 2001 as the International Education Division, UL Global oversees three key activities:

1. Full Degree: The Full Degree Student Recruitment and Partnerships team markets UL and recruits undergraduate and postgraduate degree-seeking students directly and through articulation partnerships, particularly from China, India, the Americas, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa.
    Since January 2022, this group also recruits European students.

2. Erasmus+:
    *   Erasmus+ and Non-EU Exchange: This team organises credit-bearing exchange mobility for incoming and outgoing students between UL and its EU and non-EU partners governed by formal bilateral agreements between institutions across the globe or Erasmus+ agreements for funded activities in the Erasmus+ KA131[1] project. UL has eight undergraduate programmes with a mandatory mobility semester.

    *   Erasmus+ Projects: This team manages outgoing staff mobility, blended intensive programmes and PhD mobility within the Erasmus+ KA131 project and manages Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (KA171)[2] and bilateral agreements. The team provides support to staff for Erasmus+ KA2 (Cooperation among organisations and institutions) and KA3 (Support to policy development and cooperation), from information to final reporting, as well as support for the March 2022 European Universities Initiative application.

3. Study Abroad: This team organises the fee-paying Study Abroad programme, which attracts undergraduate visiting students from North America (mainly), Asia and Europe for periods of up to one year.

Each team develops market-specific promotional material, and the Digital Marketing Officer supports all the division's digital marketing activity. The Student Support Officer works to ensure that UL's central support services cater for international students. Students overseas are supported by the Erasmus+ and Non-EU Exchange team and manager.

A new senior post of Associate Vice President Global was introduced at UL in April 2020. The postholder became the acting Provost & Deputy President in October 2020 while continuing to fulfil the role of Associate Vice President Global. Following a restructuring of the UL Executive Committee, the post was retitled Vice President Global and Community Engagement and filled in an acting capacity in May 2021, and the postholder leads the UL Global and UL Engage[3] teams. Both teams now work closely with each other.

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[1] Key Action (KA) 131: Mobility of higher education students and staff

[2] Under the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility programme, European higher education institutions can set up mobility agreements with partners around the world to send and receive students and staff.

[3] Established in September 2015 to integrate civic and community engagement into UL's core missions in research and teaching.

3   *Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)*

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The Quality Review Group (QRG) appreciated the conditions under which the review of UL Global was carried out. We felt welcome by UL Global and assisted by the Quality Support Unit. The self-assessment report (SAR) and all the meetings during the virtual visit were frank and informative.

There is very broad and strong support on and off campus for UL Global's work and the quality of its leadership and staff. The introduction of the role of VP Global & Community Engagement, the UL Global Engagement Strategy Committee and the Assistant Deans International (ADIs) has given a valuable boost to the profile and work of UL Global and internationalisation more generally. Nevertheless, UL Global is aware that it is at a crossroads. There is a strong interest within the division in engaging with the campus community and an awareness in the faculties that active engagement in internationalisation should be further promoted. The challenge that UL Global faces is its increased workload and the perceived need to revise its structure for greater impact and efficiency.

In this context, we have the following recommendations that have been conceived as a roadmap.

The first step relates to UL's internationalisation vision and strategy. Although UL Global has a clearly defined mission and objectives, it would be appropriate to develop an explicit vision for UL's internationalisation, which is currently lacking, and then review UL Global's mission and objectives in that context. Setting a vision for internationalisation should involve the campus community and the senior leadership.

The second step would involve reviewing UL Global's structure to strengthen its efficacy and embed internationalisation on campus. Two related aspects require attention: providing a more efficient and integrated structure within UL Global and promoting further engagement of faculty in internationalisation. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- UL Global has come up with possible future structures. The choice should be informed by UL's internationalisation vision and strategy. The QRG would favour bringing in a consultant to explore an alternative option that would be less "vertical" than the proposed models, with the twin goals of improving integration within UL Global and embedding internationalisation on campus. As part of this work, the consultant could explore the staffing needs in more detail.
- Building capacity in the faculties is essential. ADIs should be supported systematically by a fulltime professional staff to relieve the former from administrative responsibilities and have them focus on promoting internationalisation to their colleagues. The complex role of both the ADI and the professional staff and the skills set required should be defined precisely. Similarly, the role of UL Global in relation to faculty-based staff should be considered to ensure good coordination both within faculties and across UL.
- Faculty awareness of the importance of internationalisation should be strengthened via incentives such as seed funding, recognition in promotion, staff development and improved internal communication. UL is aware that the curriculum review is an opportunity to develop further internationalisation at home. We fully subscribe to this view.

In parallel, a second set of recommendations relates to UL Global's quality management system. UL Global has the quality management mechanisms in place, albeit not necessarily shared across the whole unit. Beyond sharing good practice across the division, it is necessary to look at the results, create action plans, ensure their implementation and report improvements to the campus community.

There are resource implications to these recommendations but taking these steps would ensure that a core element of the UL strategy will be implemented.

4 QRG Commendations and Recommendations

4.1 Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The dedicated, competent, collaborative, professional and responsive staff who are at the heart of UL Global's reputation, which is recognised most especially outside of UL.
2.	The strong collaborative links that UL Global has established and continues to enhance with key external stakeholders who have described the division as "professional", "responsive", "flexible", "proactive" and providing "leadership on behalf of the Irish universities".
3.	UL Global's success in positioning the Irish higher education sector as the preferred choice with overseas governments for scholarship opportunities.
4.	The division's proactive use of a range of mechanisms to seek feedback from international students and other stakeholders on UL Global systems and processes.
5.	The introduction of the role of VP Global & Community Engagement, which has given a valuable boost to the profile of internationalisation at UL and the work of UL Global.
6.	The ability of the division to deliver on increasingly ambitious international student recruitment targets, particularly given their current level of staff and other resources.
7.	The use of the Anthology CRM system to capture valuable market information to better recruit students and inform future practice.
8.	The response of UL Global to the Covid-19 pandemic.
9.	The very proactive involvement of UL Global in transnational education, partnerships and international networks, as commended by external stakeholders.
10.	The support offered to international students by UL Global, which is recognised as number 1 globally in the International Student Barometer (ISB) survey.
11.	The excellent support provided to both inbound and outbound students by UL Global staff, with praise by students for named individual members who went beyond the call of duty to ensure a very high level of support.
12.	The introduction of the role of the assistant deans international (ADIs).
13.	The establishment of the UL Global Engagement Strategy Committee, and supporting working groups, which provides an excellent framework in which to discuss all aspects of internationalisation.

4.2   Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

4.2.1   Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Develop an aspirational vision on why UL wishes to engage in internationalisation.	It is important that a shared vision, created and endorsed by all stakeholders across campus (so not only UL Global) be developed, discussed and then communicated across the whole university providing answers to the question as to why UL is engaging in internationalisation. Goal 3 of UL@50 provides a clear statement of international intent, but the vision behind this is missing.
2.	Decide how to position UL Global within the university.	"UL Global" is recognised as a specific brand (with a good reputation), but unfortunately this feeds into the idea that it is in some way separate from other university activities, hindering the commitment of other UL staff. If more commitment at a decentralised level is being sought, it is important as part of the vision development to think also about this branding.
3.	Address internationalisation, with all its facets and benefits, across the entire university community.	There continues to be a need to "sell" internationalisation in its entirety to all constituencies across the campus to develop a better understanding of the benefits (intellectual, cultural and financial), and tackle some of the resistance to international initiatives emerging from UL Global. While UL Global's communication to internal stakeholders has improved and is active, engagement with the messaging and information is passive and could be improved by a more structured approach.
4.	Establish a clear and consistent communication strategy for internal stakeholders of UL Global.	A number of internal stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, wider UL community) expressed frustration at the lack of consistent communication There appears to be a lack of faculty engagement and a disconnect in how internal stakeholders are informed about the work UL Global does, its strategy and future vision. The expertise in communicating to external stakeholders, which is very successful, may be drawn on for guidance.

5.	Promote engagement of faculty and academic staff in internationalisation.	While the internal communication systems are present, there is an apparent lack of faculty engagement. This is manifested in only small numbers of staff attending monthly seminars and events organised by UL Global. There is a sense that internationalisation-related activities are in addition to staff core teaching and research responsibility. As such, they are perceived as less important. There are no incentives or recognition for staff to engage with the internationalisation agenda.

6.	As a priority, and to achieve consensus, review with the help of an external consultant the three/four proposed structure options of UL Global in order to enhance internal cohesion and to future-proof the organisation to cope better with the challenges that await it.	Rather than restructuring UL Global primarily on the basis of alternative vertical columns (e.g., functional, regional, faculty-oriented), searching for more horizontal connection is deemed important to avoid further "siloing" in the division, which is perceived to be a serious problem by both UL Global staff and colleagues working with them.
7.	Build stronger partnerships between UL Global and the faculties, schools and academic colleagues.	To avoid UL Global's being perceived as "an irritant" to the faculties and to overcome the current feeling of disconnect, it is crucial that a stronger partnership with faculties, schools and departments, and especially their academic and administrative staff, be created. The ADIs can play a crucial role in this partnership, but they need to be better supported on an administrative level. In this partnership, administrators need to be able to fall back on the highly valued specialised knowledge of UL Global staff, which needs to remain at least at the same level, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. At the same time, it is important to invest in gradual capacity building regarding internationalisation at faculty level. There is a sense that the reluctance of some academic staff to engage internationally may be attributed to a lack of knowledge and resources to support faculty.

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
8.	Work with senior management to secure the resources required for UL Global to continue to operate and meet current demands and support the planned large-scale expansion of internationalisation in the university and to avoid a single point of failure.	External stakeholders described UL Global as "fragile" regarding capacity and resources. There is a recognition that the division has "real potential", but this would be significantly enhanced if it were adequately resourced. The university's reach and activities have grown significantly, but the resources have remained unchanged over the years.
		Many interviewees described the current operation as being in "firefighting mode" and at "breaking point", reacting to situations with no capacity to plan ahead.
		There is a recognition that academics have the administrative support they require for teaching and research while very little faculty/school-level support is available for internationalisation.
		An increase in capacity is required to (i) strengthen increases in international student demand; (ii) support with internationalisation at home; (iii) continue to provide high-quality international student support;
		and (iv) promote proactive engagement with the internationalisation agenda across faculties and schools.
9.	Extend UL Global activities to include permanent in-country representation covering a broader range of internationalisation activities and not just recruitment.	Activities supporting recruitment have been driven by physical and digital marketing initiatives from Limerick-based staff. The next phase of internationalisation now demands greater focus and investment in specific country markets and regions, which require permanent staff located overseas to be successful. Investment in this area must include a broader range of internationalisation activities and not just recruitment.

4.2.2   Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Prepare UL Global staff to promote and support internationalisation of the curriculum, especially in relation to the implementation of internationalisation at home (I@H) initiatives.	In the UL@50 strategy, transforming education and advancing I@H are important priorities. From a strategic point of view, it will be important to prepare UL Global staff to take an active role in bringing internationalisation closer to the faculties.
2.	In the context of an expanded view of internationalisation, review the competencies required for each role/grade and identify training needs.	Understanding the competency requirements for roles in the division will assist with identifying when training is required and how it can be implemented and used also to support requests for new posts.

3.	Review and categorise all feedback and prioritise recommendations with a planned/targeted completion date.	Valuable feedback and recommendations were submitted by stakeholders, including focus groups, and they should be reviewed and prioritised in a timely manner so that any actions are clearly targeted and planned.
4.	Review QMS processes at divisional level so that feedback and improvements are discussed in the context of all business areas.	To maximise any future developments or feedback, these should be reviewed so that benefits and implications are considered by all of the teams. Sharing improvements across the board will further develop cross-team collaboration.
5.	In addition to the ISB, consider using a wider range of data to inform performance review and decision making.	UL is already actively using the ISB and other datasets. Areas of excellence are well captured and often used in marketing and other promotional material for prospective students and partners, but there should be a clearer data-driven approach to identify and improve areas of underperformance.

Appendix One

A   Membership of the QRG

Andrée Sursock (Chair)	Senior Advisor, Higher Education Policy, European University Association, Belgium
Nuala Cullimore	Quality Officer, Academic Registry UL
Michelle Daly	PhD Researcher, Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, UL
Frederik De Decker	Head of International Relations Office, Ghent University
Dr Janet Ilieva	Founder and Director at Education Insight
Tim Rodgers	Vice President & Director of Enrolment Management at the American University of Paris
Ailish O'Farrell (Recording Secretary)	Technical Writer

B   *Membership of UL Global Self-Evaluation Team*

Director of Unit	Josephine Page	
Quality Team Leader	Denise Flannery	
Self-Evaluation Team	**Team member**	**Role in unit**
	Josephine Page	Director
	Ivanna D'Arcy	Erasmus+ Projects Manager
	Amanda Noonan	International Recruitment Manager
	Caitriona Conway	International Recruitment and Partnerships Manager
	Madeline Molyneaux	Erasmus+ and Non-EU Exchange Manager
	Katherine Martin	Study Abroad Manager
	Alli McNamara	Digital Marketing Officer
	Yvonne Crosse	Student Support Officer
	Yi Bao	Director of China Engagement
	Denise Flannery	Deputy Director