Report of the Quality Review Group

to the

Plassey Campus Centre Group

Review dates	24th to 28th April 2023
Issued by QSU	5th May 2023
UL QSU Website	www.ul.ie/quality
Unit Website	www.campuslife.ul.ie; www.ulsport.ie; www.uch.ie
QQI Website	www.qqi.ie

Approved for publication by the Quality Committee, 7th June 2023

University of Limerick

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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 self-evaluation 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 self-assessment 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, Chief Corporate Officer and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2   Summary Details of Plassey Campus Centre Group

A subsidiary of UL, Plassey Campus Centre (PCC) Group manages the university's core commercial activity. PCC Group operates PCC (the overarching company responsible for student accommodation, conferences and events), University Concert Hall (UCH), UL Sport, UL Visitor Centre and other commercial activity on campus, such as catering and retail services. Although PCC Group has a subsidiary development company, Plassey Campus Developments, that subsidiary is resourced by UL employees and its activities are not managed by the PCC Group Chief Operations Officer (COO) or employees.

PCC was first established in 1985 to develop residential, social and recreational facilities for UL on a self-funding basis. PCC was developed as an autonomous entity trading as a company limited by guarantee and reporting to its own board of directors.

While PCC's primary role initially was to develop and manage student accommodation on a self-funding basis, the company now also takes responsibility for developing and managing outsourced retail services, restaurants, cafés, club bars and the main catering contract on campus. The company is required to put innovative and dynamic funding mechanisms in place for capital projects and to be entrepreneurial in the generation of additional revenue to support facilities and services under its management. While operating under strict financial controls, the company is driven by market forces and has a strong customer focus. PCC has been the driving force of the physical development of a 'living campus' and, over time, extended its mission to support sport and the arts.

PCC took corporate responsibility for UCH in 2012 and UL Sport in 2018, thus forming PCC Group (Figure 1.1 below). PCC Group currently manages an asset base of €258 million (m) and generated an EBITA (earnings before interest, taxes and amortisation) of approximately €12.2m in 2022.
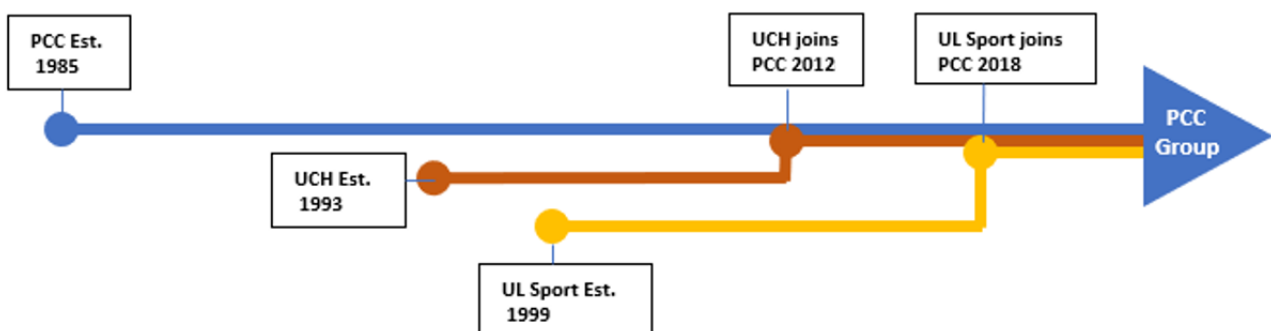

Figure 1.1: Evolution of Plassey Campus Centre Group 1985–2023

3 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

3.0 Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) wishes to thank University of Limerick (UL) and the Quality Support Unit (QSU) for the hospitality we were shown during our visit. We appreciate the opportunity to learn more about UL and Plassey Campus Centre (PCC) Group and hope that our review will add some value to what is clearly an outstanding university and campus.

We would also like to acknowledge the excellent support we received from the QSU and specifically Kim O'Mahony, whose support both before and during the onsite visit has been exceptional and has made our work far easier.

In all of our engagements, we were met with friendliness, a willingness to deal fully with our queries, and an eagerness to use the quality review process as a lever for further development of PCC Group and its constituent entities.

PCC Group is a holding entity that encompasses a number of University entities:

- PCC is tasked with developing and managing student accommodation, residence life, catering and events using innovative financing structures.
- UL Sport was established in 1999 to manage and develop UL's sports facilities.
- University Concert Hall (UCH) programmes and manages the concert hall and supports the delivery of entertainment and events at the University.

All three entities are supported by their own boards which provide oversight and financial governance. Operational management is provided by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) with the senior management of each entity reporting to the COO.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit all three entities in a very significant way, with a collapse in activity and revenue. UL Sport and UCH, in particular, suffered from a loss of staff and skills. All three management teams should be recognised for making so much progress in recovering from the impact of the pandemic while still operating under financial and staffing constraints.

The self-assessment report (SAR) and extensive supporting material made available to the QRG provided a deep insight into the operational structures and management practices of the three entities. The onsite visit provided ample evidence that there is strong management oversight and that all three entities are well run.

What has emerged from the review is that PCC Group is at a nexus in its development. The structures, governance and ways of working that have contributed to the success of PCC, UL Sport and UCH over the last twenty years need to evolve and reflect the ongoing growth of UL, changing student needs and the realities of a post-Covid world.

The findings and recommendations of the QRG can be summarised as follow:

- A number of recommendations are for the University to define its strategic ambitions for student accommodation, sport, and arts & culture so as to provide the different entities with guidance on developing their own strategies in alignment with the mission and values of UL.
- A number of recommendations relate to the governance of the various entities to remove ambiguous reporting and oversight structures.
- All three entities have distinct funding and investment challenges, and there are recommendations in relation to addressing these challenges.

- UCH and UL Sport are operating with staffing levels that are well below those of the pre-Covid period but with activity levels that are close to pre-Covid levels. A number of recommendations are aimed at addressing these gaps.

While there is a large number of recommendations in the report, the importance of UL's providing strategic guidance to PCC Group is critical. In the absence of this guidance, there is a risk of the different entities developing approaches that conflict with the ambitions of the University.

4   *University QRG Recommendations*

4.1   *University Recommendations*

Some of the findings of the QRG include recommendations that are beyond the gift of PCC Group or its constituent entities and require the executive of the University to address them. This section lists these recommendations. It should also be noted that some of the recommended actions for PCC Group will be contingent on the response of the University to these items.

The QRG recommends the following:

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Clearly define the role (vision and mission) both of sport and arts & culture within University of Limerick's overall mission and strategic plan.	Without exception, all stakeholders interviewed during the onsite visit identified the importance of sport (and to a slightly lesser degree, arts & culture) to UL. However, when asked to define how sport and the arts contributed to the mission of UL, the answers became less clear and were somewhat contradictory.
2.	Develop a robust strategy for the role that sport plays in UL, with guidance on how the values of the University can be translated into actionable plans and on how future initiatives should be prioritised. The strategy should be supported by clear measures and timeframes.	The UL@50 strategy acknowledges the importance of sport to the ongoing development of the University. The plan does not offer strategic guidance as to what this means and how it might be achieved. In the absence of a strategy, it is difficult for organisations like UL Sport to determine how to reconcile competing demands and priorities, such as how the different needs of the student body, high performance (HP) users and those of the community are to be balanced with commercial realities.
		The strategy should also be linked to the academic and educational goals of the University.
		As part of this strategic planning process, consider the optimal organisational positioning of UL Sport, and whether being a component part of PCC Group is the optimal solution.
3.	Develop a robust strategy for the role that arts & culture play in UL, with guidance on how the values of the University can be translated into actionable plans and on how future initiatives should be prioritised. The strategy should be supported by clear measures and timeframes.	The UL@50 strategy acknowledges the importance of arts & culture to the ongoing development of the University. The plan does not offer strategic guidance as to what this means and how it might be achieved. In the absence of a strategy, it is difficult for organisations like UCH to determine how to reconcile competing demands and priorities.
		The strategy should also be linked to the academic and educational goals of the University.
		As part of this strategic planning process, consider the optimal organisational positioning of UCH, and whether being a component part of PCC Group is the optimal solution.

4.	Pause the current development of the PCC, UL Sport and UCH strategic plans while the University develops and articulates its vision, mission and strategies for accommodation, sport and arts & culture. An important element of this recommendation is to communicate with all participants about the current strategic planning exercise so that they are aware of the actions being taken.	The individual PCC Group entities (PCC, UL Sport and UCH) are working on developing strategic plans but without a framework to guide them; the plans are being developed independently of each other and are therefore likely to be suboptimal when it comes to making decisions in areas such as resource allocation and prioritisation of activities. For example, should a high performance facility be prioritised over a facility for the sole benefit of students; or should more resources be allocated to arts & culture rather than to a sports initiative?
5.	In addition to revenue, determine what UL wants from PCC and what its priorities are, so that the PCC mission and operations can meet these needs.	It is clear that PCC is focused on bottom-line financial concerns. There does not appear to be a 'balanced scorecard' which emphasises the wider experience and reputational aspects of the University.
6.	Develop a more sophisticated model (incorporating multiple factors such as population growth; demand for multi-bed rooms; number of international students; changes in the type of student: undergraduates, postgraduates; ambitions for the student experience) that determines the optimal number of rooms required by the University to meet its future needs. PCC can then develop a medium- to long-term investment plan to support the needs of the University.	The ratio of rooms to student population is currently 15% (and is planned to increase to 17% based on current projections). It is not clear that this ratio is sufficient to meet the future demand of the university. It may be that a higher proportion of on-campus accommodation would serve as a unique selling point (USP) to help student number growth. It is worth noting that in the UK, higher percentages of on-campus student accommodation are not unusual in smaller towns/cities with lower levels of private rental accommodation. The aim to increase international students is likely to increase pressure on accommodation. Could UL/PCC offer three- or four-year places on campus for international students as a specific USP? Options other than what PCC provides should be explored to deliver increased accommodation levels if needed. While concern has been expressed that the changing population dynamics (the population 'bulge') could lead to lower occupancy rates as student populations fall, other factors (for example, increased numbers of international students) could compensate for this.

5   PCC Group QRG Commendations and Recommendations

5.1   PCC Group Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The PCC Group staff and management for the manner in which they responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, for doing their utmost to maintain stakeholder relationships and returning to 'near normal' operations, despite the legacy financial and staffing challenges that resulted from the pandemic.
2.	The management teams of all three entities (PCC, UL Sport and UCH), which have been complimented for improving communications and engagement with other stakeholders within UL.
3.	The high motivation and energy of the staff across all three entities and the obvious pride they have in their areas and in what they do.
4.	The financial discipline and controls that PCC Group applies across the board, which is evident in the robust financial results of the group and its constituent entities.
5.	The development of the PCC quality management IT infrastructure and the PCC Hub as a central repository for processes and procedures.

5.2 PCC Group Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

5.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	If the structure of PCC Group remains as is (i.e., a parent entity for PCC, UL Sport and UCH), then working with UL senior management, implement a new board structure. PCC Group should have a board with oversight of all PCC Group entities, with an executive team responsible for implementing the board's strategy. The board should be supported by subcommittees with specialisations in accommodation, sport and the arts. A direct link needs to be created between the PCC Group Board and the Executive Committee.	The current structure is complex with unclear separation of responsibilities between the independent boards and the PCC Group executive. The de facto structure is that the PCC board is fulfilling the role of the group board. A single board with members from the property/accommodation, arts & culture and sport domains would help ensure an integrated and balanced approach to the development of PCC Group.
2.	To reflect the different needs of UL Sport and UCH, expand the range of performance indicators used beyond the financial measures historically used by PCC (balanced scorecard).	The emphasis on financial discipline needs to be balanced with other key performance indicators (KPIs) that help to ensure that each organisation can develop to its full potential. Other KPIs should reflect and be aligned with the overall UL strategy for sport and arts & culture. Some practical examples of how this might be manifested are to have a multi-year programming budget for UCH and parameters regarding when commercial events can and cannot be booked at the expense of student activities.
3.	Develop a rolling ethical and sustainability planning process, to be included in the quality management system (QMS), to create metrics and deliver improvements.	There is not sufficient evidence of work being carried out in this area. Feedback from students suggested that they didn't like being told to turn the heating off when they could see no benefit and when they were 'paying so much'.
4.	Develop enhanced feedback channels, such as focus groups, within PCC Group for all staff, students and visitors and ensure that the feedback loop is closed.	Introduce a 'You Said, We Did' approach to individual feedback, surveys and other collective feedback.

5.5.2   Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Review HR practices between UL and PCC Group to ensure equity and consistency.	It is noted that during the pandemic, PCC Group staff were treated differently from UL staff; the impact of this is still being felt by the UL Sport staff in particular.
2.	Define and implement an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policy across PCC Group.	While there are occasional references to EDI in the SAR, a number of challenges and gaps were noted during the onsite visit.
3.	Develop a set of values that reflect the strategic mission of PCC Group (and that of the University), to be reflected in the ongoing performance management processes. Deploy these across PCC, UL Sport and UCH and use them to promote the services across the University.	As part of establishing PCC Group as a coherent and recognisable organisation, it will be important for it to have a set of values and behavioural norms that reflect the values of the University and, in addition, enrich these with the unique strengths that come from PCC, UL Sport and UCH.
4.	Liaise with Buildings & Estates (B&E) to identify spaces that meet the needs for co-location of PCC staff. Similarly identify an appropriate location and scale of office accommodation for UCH staff.	It is understood that there is a proposal to relocate the PCC team to the space vacated by Student Life when the new student centre opens. This should be considered as it would facilitate the redeployment of the UL Arena space for sporting activities. The co-location of staff was identified as an issue in the 2016 QRG report and it remains an ongoing challenge. UCH continues to face an issue both with the amount of office space it has and with the quality and location of this. There is a clear need for more space to facilitate internal communications and increased staffing levels.
5.	Review the membership of the three PCC Group boards to ensure that the skill sets meet the needs of the entities they represent.	Perhaps consider increasing the number of non-university appointments.
6.	Identify pathways to publicise the activities, achievements and successes of the PCC Group to staff, students and external stakeholders.	The success of UL students (and staff) in the sporting and artistic fields needs to be publicised more (for example, UL winning the Fitzgibbon Cup) – such publicity would help with recruitment and retention activities.

6 PCC - QRG Commendations and Recommendations

6.1 PCC Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The hard work carried out by the whole PCC team to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to provide services to the University.
2.	The pride staff show in what they do and in their organisation.
3.	The excellent financial returns PCC has achieved over a number of years, providing income to UL and capital for reinvestment.
4.	The robust PCC quality management system (QMS), which includes looking outside the University, benchmarking, feedback and ratings to improve operations and service.
5.	The excellent PCC financial systems, information and controls, which provide clear sight on financial performance and enable clear actions to address shortfalls.
6.	PCC's success in significantly growing the residential estate to provide a higher-than-national-average number of student beds and in taking imaginative approaches to providing short- and medium- term solutions to help address the current accommodation crisis.
7.	In addition to encouraging wider external engagement with the University through a strong summer programme, the delivery by UL Events of a significant income to PCC, though it is acknowledged that this has created challenges for other areas in the University.
8.	The creation of innovative and engaging Living Learning spaces and Res Life programmes.

6.2 PCC Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

6.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Revisit the option of twin-bed accommodation to increase bed numbers, and plan in consultation with students around demand for this type of accommodation and realistic living spaces.	The proposed twin-bed project appears to have been designed around technical space and overall number demands, without appropriate engagement with students on the real student living experience.
2.	Undertake a comprehensive review of all food & beverage provision across campus in the light of the post-pandemic reality,	Feedback from staff and students was that the range, quality and value for money for food were

	to create a food philosophy that supports a fit-for-purpose offer with improved options for students, staff and visitors.	not good. There was visible evidence that the menu options are relatively narrow. The Farmers' Market was praised for adding choice and value – though it has reduced in size more recently. Improved options would cover choice, price points, health, lifestyle, allergens, and provision for international customers. Reviewing the provision might be assisted by an external consultant.
3.	Ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver an accommodation maintenance programme to deliver a sector-leading student experience and value for money.	Whilst there is a clear desire to refurbish residences, there need to be sufficient resources to do this and evidence from students, though limited, was that some residences are quite tired and that equipment and even heating do not always work.
4.	Improve laundrettes by implementing a plan to introduce greater numbers of machines, ensure high levels of maintenance, and review pricing and digital information.	The laundrettes were visibly tired and significant feedback from students suggested that this was an area where service and value for money fell short. The coin mechanisms are usually the largest root of faults.
5.	Develop a local community engagement and communications process that is included early in the planning phase for new student accommodation builds.	This supports the University's city and region strategic engagement and should help the timely delivery of new accommodation.
6.	Review the QMS to allow more qualitative feedback, for example through focus groups, and introducing the 'You Said, We Did' approach to surveys, and collective and individual feedback.	The QMS is of a very high calibre, but the PCC team identified the need to close the feedback loop more completely. Making students aware that their feedback is valued and acted upon builds trust and increases the likelihood that they will engage with feedback-gathering mechanisms. Even when action is not possible, an explanation regarding this is appreciated.

6.2.2   Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Develop catering standards and principles to be monitored on a frequent basis with the involvement of staff and students.	To support the delivery of a new food philosophy-driven food & beverage offer, an improved feedback loop is needed. The QRG questioned the value of a Catering Committee, but understood a need to work closely with partners, such as Student Life.

2.	Improve digital information about retail and hospitality food & beverage provision, so that menus, hospitality ordering, promotion and food philosophy are easily accessible.	Feedback from staff and students suggested that information about outlets and hospitality services was not easy to find online or via social media.
3.	Consider single electronic point of sale (EPOS) and/or the hospitality ordering systems to improve customer experience and provide critical data for future planning.	PCC said that they wished to improve sales information and a single EPOS would support this, but also give the ability to coordinate activities, promotion and the customer interface. A single route to order food online would increase data available to PCC, but also improve the customer experience.
4.	Review room inspection processes, both prior to arrival to ensure a high-quality arrival experience and during the year to reduce a perceived 'audit' approach, and use the process for engagement and to check well-being.	There was feedback from students that rooms were not all at their best when they arrived, but also that the in-year inspections tended towards the officious.
5.	Identify a contractor to service the Allegro café in a way that suits the requirements of UCH.	This is also identified in UCH priorities. An improved food offering and availability around performance/rehearsal times would enhance UCH's offering to audiences and provide a facility to large-scale performing groups to be catered for in-house.
6.	Improve the coffee offer to ensure consistent high quality across campus.	Feedback from staff indicated that there are limited places where good-quality coffee can be found, with poor examples available in other outlets.
7.	In conjunction with the University and Student Life, provide a bus to the local 'value for money' supermarket on one day a week.	There was significant feedback from students about the cost of food and groceries and the long walk to the nearest supermarket. There was a bus service previously.
8.	Display feedback opportunities in rooms in student residences in a straightforward way, for example through a QR code.	Displaying feedback options on overcrowded spaces, such as on poster boards, and seeking feedback through emails tend not to be productive.
9.	Clarify and promote the role of UL Events for internal customers.	There was some confusion from staff as to what the offer for internal customers is.
10.	Review the resource available for Res Life and events to ensure it is sufficient to drive a high-quality accommodation experience.	There are clear ambitions to deliver a high-quality programme, but the QRG had a sense that the resource available was constraining activity. It was pointed out that there was an emphasis on free and low-cost activity.

7 UL Sport - QRG Commendations and Recommendations

7.1 UL Sport Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The passion, diligence and enthusiasm of the UL Sport team, despite reduced staffing numbers and in complex circumstances.
2.	The continuing delivery of sports services at such impressive levels and to such high standards, despite a challenging environment and a very lean staffing structure.
3.	The collegiality that exists and the pride in sport at UL demonstrated by students, staff and stakeholders.
4.	The evidence of better collaboration with other areas of PCC Group and the University.
5.	The policy established to provide dual career support for high performance athletes and the co-operation of faculties and departments to fully implement this.

7.2 UL Sport Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

7.2.1 Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Work with senior UL management to review the positioning of sport to re-integrate it into the University structures.	There is an unequivocal perception across all groups – students, staff and stakeholders – that UL Sport is 'commercial'. In addition, the role that sport plays in UL has been described by stakeholders as 'confused'. Whilst there are benefits to UL Sport's being part of PCC Group, it doesn't seem to be in close alignment with the values and philosophy of the University. It is respectfully suggested that this is already damaging the reputation and impact of sport and could be significantly consequential.
2.	Work with UL senior management to devise a 'strategy for sport' which clearly identifies the role of sport, and the expectations related to it, in Ireland's Sporting Campus.	What does Ireland's Sporting Campus mean? There is 'confusion' on the role that sport plays at UL. Currently, it is attempting to be 'everything to everybody' and the only KPI seems to be the bottom line. The creation of a strategy for sport should be led by the Director of Sport and align with the overall (new) strategy for the University. The process to devise the strategy will involve a robust consultation process with all relevant stakeholders, and the outturn should be focused and prioritised.

3.	Develop a robust business plan to underpin the full implementation of the strategy for sport.	The business plan will take account of points 4, 5 and 6 below and be informed by: • Rigorous assumptions on key income streams (memberships/levy), facility hire and programming. • Cost of a staffing structure that is fit for purpose. • Operating costs that include a focus on programme development.
4.	Carry out a thorough review of the current staffing structure to align with strategic objectives and to address significant gaps and pressures within the current resource, with an increased emphasis on student recreational activities.	The current staffing levels are very lean, relative to similar size university sport models in Ireland and the UK. In addition, the structure is flat, with too many reports to the Director of Sport. The strategy for sport/business plan will determine the optimal staffing structure, but consideration should be given to interim changes that will create distinct business areas and a streamlined structure.
5.	Create a capital investment plan that is intrinsically aligned to the delivery of strategic sporting priorities.	Whilst acknowledging the impressive sports facilities estate, there appears to have been an over-emphasis on facility developments, at the expense of strategic sports development. Future capital projects should be based on the strategic needs of the University, supported by partnerships with other groups and organisations.
6.	Engage the student body to discuss the introduction of a levy that may be needed to deliver the totality of the sporting ambition and vision for sport at UL.	Students should be integrally involved in the development of the strategy for sport, the outturn of which will embed ownership of the implementation plans and actions necessary to achieve the vision. The proposed levy should be aligned to the programmes and activities – that is, the increased sport/physical activity/wellbeing opportunities, as opposed to the bricks and mortar. Consider the timing of these discussions bearing in mind that the new Student Life centre, funded by an existing levy, is not complete.
7.	As a priority, explore options to create additional gym space in the short term.	The restrictive gym space is causing irretrievable damage to membership sales, experience and retention. Notwithstanding longer-term capital development plans, a short-term solution should be explored. An options appraisal should be undertaken, and the following possibilities considered: • Repurpose the top floor of the Arena. The current offices do not have to be located in the sports building. • Construct a modular building on the tennis courts or other outdoor area. This could facilitate a very functional strength & conditioning (S&C) space

		and the current space might be designated for cardiovascular (CV) training.
8.	Establish a service level agreement (SLA) with Building & Estates to clarify role and responsibility for the effective maintenance of all sports facilities.	The absence of this clarity is detrimental to the state of the sports facilities, particularly the indoor provision. The resulting impact is on reputation and user experience, both of which are consequential in terms of business continuity and delivery.

7.2.2   Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Establish an SLA or memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the University's central Marketing & Communications Division to showcase key sporting headlines and promote sport as a USP for the University.	Sport is clearly a USP at UL and should feature more prominently in stories and communications. This will reinforce the recruitment advantage, relative to competitor institutions, amplify the sporting reputation and give deserved credit to the achievements and performances of talented students. It was surprising that the Fitzgibbon victory, or appearances in the finals of the Sigerson and Collingwood cups, did not appear in any of the quality review documentation for sport.
2.	Create a dashboard of key management information to inform business development priorities.	As well as supporting management decisions, this will assist with the articulation of the impact that sport is making on the student experience. It is proposed that each area reports on a monthly basis and the headlines might be shared in a wider staff communication. It is noted that the new access gates will assist with the collation of more robust data and the requisite reporting mechanism via Gladstone will be utilised.
3.	Review the programme and delivery of classes to focus on participation levels as opposed to the number of classes.	It is beneficial to promote the availability of 120+ weekly classes and whilst the virtual options are self-sufficient, a closer look at the data would question the rationale for the current approach. The utilisation information provided to the QRG was for a five-day period in February and showed that 28% of the virtual classes had no participants, whilst 33% had five or fewer attendees.
4.	Establish guiding principles to underpin the effective programming of facilities, aligned to sporting priorities.	The clarification of strategic priorities will determine the approach that should be adopted to optimally programme all sports facilities. In the interim, however, the guiding principles for each area of the facility should be written down and used to manage the expectations of users.

| 5. | Identify an opportunity to celebrate sporting success at all levels on an annual basis, such as a Sports Awards event or a link to an existing event. | In addition to the many sporting successes and achievements of high-performance athletes, there is a wealth of accolades at student club and individual levels. As well as creating an occasion to recognise these accomplishments, it is an opportunity to further enshrine collegiality through sport, and it gives senior officers, staff and other friends of UL Sport the chance to celebrate the student experience. |

8. University Concert Hall (UCH) - QRG Commendations and Recommendations

8.1   UCH Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1.	The University Concert Hall (UCH) staff, who are held in high regard by internal and external stakeholders.
2.	The successful upgrade of the UCH foyer and bar facilities.
3.	The UCH Board and the Director and her team for their response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery they have achieved despite critical staff difficulties.
4.	The UCH Director and her team for the support and range of services they provide, including excellent liaison with external and internal stakeholders, as evidenced by the outstanding compliments paid to them by stakeholders during discussions with the QRG.

8.2   UCH Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

8.2.1   Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Work with UL senior management to formulate and action a UL strategy for the arts & culture that sets out clearly the status of UCH as a principal player and raises the public profile of all arts and cultural bodies on the campus with a focus on the greater good of the students, staff and the public of the Limerick region.	This is the consistent view of stakeholders and consultees who believe that the UL arts and cultural bodies should be part of a holistic campuswide strategy. This should include the Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO), the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD), galleries and libraries.
2.	Review the business model underpinning the activities of UCH to facilitate a longer-view sustained artistic programme.	There is a genuine need to break out of the safety-first risk position which focuses on the bottom line and reduces the options to programme at higher levels. It will be essential to change the perception by the Arts Council of UCH as a purely commercial entity and to emphasise its remit to serve its audience within UL and in the Mid-West. Its current state of being 'cruelly underfunded' as described by one stakeholder is seriously undermining UCH's ability to realise its ambition and potential to reach the high standards of artistic programming it is capable of.

3.	Develop a strategy to deliver staffing levels that satisfy the current demands on staff and key skills and will allow for growth of programming and improved marketing, fundraising and technical support.	This is the strong view of both external and internal stakeholders who recognise the present staffing levels are unsustainable.
4.	Build stronger relationships and partnerships with regional orchestras and choirs as well as other internal and external arts organisations and facilities.	This will provide opportunities for co-funding of artistic programming and profile building for UCH and help to obviate a perception that UCH is purely commercial or a facility for hire. Ultimately, this will contribute to UL's city and region strategic ambitions and improved relations with national funding bodies.
5.	Work with UL senior management to develop a strategy that will position UCH to be able to apply for funding from the Arts Council and other national and regional organisations.	This may involve a reimagining of UCH's artistic ambitions, increased partnerships with internal and external stakeholders and arts organisations, and a strategic board-level approach to relationship building on a national level. A funding strategy would support UCH in achieving over a period an appropriate level of Arts Council and local authority subvention commensurate with the concert hall's national and regional status and in line with other similar-sized and programmed halls nationally.
6.	Secure the funding to replace the 1,000 plus seats that are clearly well past their effective life with high-quality seating with lecture tablets.	There is an unquestionable and clear need for an early and full replacement of the current 30-year-old seats which are used extensively for academic teaching and UCH events. Failure to address this issue exposes the University to health and safety risks (H&S).
7.	Create a robust capital investment plan to upgrade the UCH back-of-house facilities and infrastructure to levels that match the ambitions of the strategy.	There have been strong arguments from external stakeholders and the UCH Director to give UCH an appropriate facility to maintain visits and attract new groups to the hall. The upgrade should include a good-quality back-of-house facility to include additional dressing rooms and choir/orchestra changing rooms, with washing, toilet and shower facilities to match numbers, together with an appropriately sized green room and a rehearsal space suitable for a choir/chamber orchestra and larger music groups.
8.	Plan and action an effective get-in area and expanded storage facility for access to the UCH stage, with provision for safe control and road markings to minimise risk from lorry movements.	Funding is needed to address current H&S risks, along with the requirement for safe and adequate storage for orchestra instrument cases, stage show equipment and scenery.

9.	Replace the wheelchair lift in UCH with a fit-for-purpose, legislation-compliant installation.	While the UCH website is incredibly user-friendly, it is advertised that the venue is wheelchair accessible. From our findings and the SAR, the venue does not currently have a wheelchair-accessible lift and has had negative experiences regarding this as recently as this month. It is recommended that the reference to wheelchair accessibility be removed from the UCH website until the lift has been deemed accessible.
10.	Improve lines of communication between the UCH and PCC boards by co-option of the UCH chair or senior arts-based representative to aid understanding of the more detailed aspects of UCH programming and operations.	Internal stakeholders have strongly recommended that a more detailed understanding of UCH's work and requirements should be communicated at a high level.

5.2.2   Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1.	Improve the quality of the food offer in the Allegro café adjoining UCH with a supplier/operator who can deliver an appropriate service.	An improved food offering and availability around performance/rehearsal times would enhance UCH's offering to audiences and provide a facility to large-scale performing groups to be catered for in-house.
2.	Clarify and consolidate the position of IT/AV provision by UCH on a defined basis to internal customers across the campus.	UCH technicians are increasingly involved in supporting other internal users around the campus without a clear definition of their obligations.
3.	Effectively communicate information on box office opening hours and an understanding of the online booking service.	There appears to have been some dissatisfaction regarding the opening hours of the box office. Measures to improve these need to be communicated.
4.	Sing the praises of and publicise the UCH acoustics, which are recognised by experts as the best in the country.	Stakeholders with excellent credentials in the music field have highlighted this important asset.
5.	To increase student engagement with UCH, regularly update social media and use digital boards across campus to advertise activities and create a welcoming environment for students.	There was feedback from students on their lack of awareness of activities or events, other than lectures, taking place in UCH. For UCH to increase its student engagement, an active social media presence directed at students would be valuable. Including a 'Students' Page' on the UCH website could be useful to highlight opportunities for involvement and events.
6.	Work to build a relationship between the UCH team and Student Life officers for collaboration on events of interest	Both students and the Student Life office reported the need to be made aware of events happening in UCH other than lectures during the day.

	to students and the advertising of such events.	Initiatives to engage students might include, for example, cinema nights, discounted tickets and volunteer opportunities.
		It is understood that this can be a challenge when Student Life officers work short term, but this work is incredibly important when trying to increase student engagement with UCH.
7.	Clarify and communicate booking requirements with key internal stakeholders.	Because of the multi-pronged booking approach for UCH depending on time of day or year, confusion can exist as to who has access to the space and when.

Appendix One

A   Membership of the QRG

Mr. Ronan Hanrahan (Chair)	Chief Transformation Officer, Eversheds Sutherland
Mr. Roger Spence	Theatre Consultant and Non-ED on the Sadlers Wells Foundation
Ms. Cathy Gallagher	Executive Director of Sport, University of Stirling
Mr. Jo Hardman	Director of Commercial Services, Lancaster University
Ms. Ruby Cooney	Final Year Education & Training Student, DCU
Mr. Eoin Brady	Internal Communications Manager, Marketing & Communications Division, UL
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell (Recording Secretary)	Technical Writer

B   Membership of PCC Group Quality Team

Director of Unit	Michael Foley	Chief Operations Officer, PCC Group
Quality Team Leader	John O'Rourke	Deputy Chief Operations Officer, PCC Group
Self-Evaluation Team	Team member	Role in unit
	Jason Hegarty	Acting General Manager, Student Residences, PCC
	Helen Walsh	Financial Controller, PCC Group
	Katie Maher	Management Accountant, PCC
	Aishling Casey	General Manager, UL Events, PCC
	Brian King	Director, UL Sport
	Neasa O'Donnell	Senior Executive Sports Manager, UL Sport
	Sinead Hope	Director, UCH
	Jennifer Flewett	Operations Manager, UCH
	Nick Brophy	Group IT Manager, PCC Group