



# **Quality Review Framework**

**Cycle 4**

**AY2023/24-AY2028/29**

**Scope of Academic Reviews and Overview of Process**

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## 1 Quality at the University of Limerick

The periodic quality review of functional units (academic, research and support) and programmes at the University of Limerick (UL) represents two cornerstone institutional quality assurance/quality enhancement mechanisms. This document sets out the proposed scope of a combined academic department / programme review, which will apply in the next cycle of systematic internal review (Cycle 4).

### 1.1 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to outline UL's proposed quality review process in general terms and to describe in detail the scope as it relates to the review of academic departments and programmes. The document owner is the Director of Quality.

## 2 UL's Quality Review Framework – Cycle 4

### 2.1 Background

UL's quality review process, as applied to both academic, research institutes, professional services units and affiliates, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy university quality policy and meet legislative QA requirements. UL 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*, which places a legal responsibility on universities to establish, maintain and enhance QA procedures relating to their activities and services (Part 3, Section 28). These QA procedures must take due account of relevant quality guidelines issued by [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI). QQI is the statutory body responsible for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of QA procedures adopted and implemented by higher (and further) educational institutions within Ireland.

The University's Academic Programme Review [policy](#) specifies a requirement for programmes to undergo a programme review within 5 years of its initial accreditation.

### 2.2 Purpose of the Quality Review Framework

The purpose of the quality review framework is:

- To provide a structured opportunity for the department to engage in periodic and strategic evidence-based self-reflection and assessment in the context of the quality of its activities, its programmes and processes and to identify opportunities for quality enhancement.
- To provide a framework by which internal and external peers, in an evidence-based manner, can independently review, evaluate, report upon and suggest improvements to the quality of the department's activities, programmes and processes
- To provide a framework by which the department implements enhancements to quality in a verifiable manner
- To provide UL, its students, its prospective students, staff and other stakeholders with independent evidence of the quality of the department's activities and programmes
- To ensure that all UL units are evaluated in a systematic and standardised manner in accordance with good international practice and in support of the objectives of the university's [quality statement](#)
- To satisfy good international practice in the context of quality assurance in higher education and to meet statutory QA requirements as enshrined in national law

- To demonstrate evidence-based enhancements to University systems, services and processes

### 2.2.1 Ethos

The ethos of the quality review process is that participants would proactively engage in a mutually supportive and constructive spirit and that the process would be undertaken in a transparent, inclusive, independent, evidence-based and cost-effective manner. The process provides scope for recognising achievement and good practice as well as identifying potential opportunities for quality enhancement.

### 2.2.2 Focus of Cycle 4 reviews

Academic departments<sup>1</sup> were systematically reviewed during Cycle 2 (2009-2016). Programmes have undergone routine modifications through quality assurance processes such as major and minor modifications through Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) and where relevant through Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) evaluations and accreditations.

Cycle 4 will combine academic departmental and periodic programme review, recognising the synergies between both and that a ‘one-size fits all’ approach cannot apply due to the varying sizes of departments and the continuing need for some programmes to undergo external accreditation. In accordance with the [Policy for Management and Reporting on Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies \(PSRB\)](#) Cycle 4 will facilitate, where appropriate, the recognition of external accreditation in place of the internal quality assurance process. However, in all cases the requirements of the university and the scope/terms of reference of departmental and periodic programme review must be demonstrated to be fulfilled. In cases where there are gaps between the requirements of the university and those of a PSRB, a tailored scope of internal review will be agreed with the Head of Department and approved by Quality Committee and Academic Council.

Cycle 4 also facilitates the implementation of the University’s Integrated Curriculum Development Framework ([ICDF](#)) allowing existing programmes to be benchmarked against the principles of the ICDF.

### 2.2.3 Programme Families

Where the number of programmes offered by a department requires the running of parallel programme reviews, programmes will be clustered into programme families. The composition of programme families will be agreed with the Head of Department at the beginning of the pre-review phase of the process. Programmes may be clustered by subject, by programme level or other natural grouping identified by the Head of Department.

## 2.3 Scope of Academic Reviews

In addition to addressing the general purpose of UL’s unit-level quality review activity, the terms of reference of the combined academic department and periodic programme review will incorporate the terms of reference set out below. These terms have been developed with reference to those used at Cycle 2 of review, the Academic Programme Review Policy and institutional strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Where the academic area under review is a ‘School’ references to department should be understood to mean School or where relevant, Head of School

### 2.3.1 Departmental Review

The departmental review will include an evaluation of

- a. the extent to which the mission of the department (i.e. its broad educational and research aims) is being achieved, with reference to
  - i. UL's overall strategy and strategies for Learning, Teaching & Assessment, Equality and Human Rights, UL's sustainability framework, academic integrity framework, the Faculty strategy and other strategies as they are developed
  - ii. Educational needs of society, economy & industry
- b. the management and organisational structures within the department including programme management and interaction with department boards and department management structures.
- c. how the programme portfolio and lifecycle is managed and how curriculum is maintained, benchmarked nationally and internationally, updated and communicated to support the aims of the department with particular reference to the current Learning, Teaching & Assessment and Research strategies.
- d. the department's approach to learning, teaching and assessment with particular reference to the current learning, teaching & assessment strategy
- e. service teaching of modules to other departments and faculties
- f. how the department's research is planned and linked to university research strategy,
- g. staffing, staff career development, and resources available to staff within the department with specific reference to university policies on work allocation, HR/EDI and staff development
- h. how the department manages and uses its facilities and learning resources, including shared resources.
- i. how the department plans for future resource requirements (recruitment, facilities, budgetary requirements) within academic cycles.
- j. the centralised and local supports and guidance available to students with specific reference to university policies on HR/EDI and Learning, Teaching & Assessment or student related strategies.
- k. how the department responds to and acts on student and staff feedback.
- l. Relationships within broader university – how relationships across departments, professional support units and institutional structures are developed, maintained and managed.
- m. External stakeholder management with for example. Coop/ teaching practice / employers / alumni are managed by the department and how these relationships inform the direction of the department/programme design/delivery.

### 2.3.2 Programme Review

The programme review will include an evaluation of the programme's

- a) **Performance**
  - i. Applications, enrolment, progression, retention, award outcomes, student satisfaction, graduate employability and its attractiveness to learners.
- b) **Alignment with NFQ and UL Academic Model**
  - i. Evaluation of the programme learning outcomes with relevant standards, award type descriptors, credit volumes and titles

- c) **Alignment with UL's Integrated Curriculum Development Framework (ICDF), in particular, alignment with the following:**
  - i. **Graduate Attributes:** The UL Graduate is an active and globally engaged citizen.
  - ii. **Principles of Curriculum Design:** The principles of curriculum design are founded on academic excellence and integrity.
  - iii. **Design of the Learning Environment:** The pedagogy and learning environment foster a transformative learning experience.
  - iv. **UL's Ambitions and Strengths:** The curriculum builds on the institution's existing strengths and defines a shared understanding of the curriculum, which aligns to the institutional vision and strategic goals of the University.
- d) **Use of Learning Technologies & Learning Analytics:**
  - i. Evaluation of the proposed mode of delivery appropriate in light of a review of relevant student feedback and learning data to ensure optimal curriculum design.
  - ii. Evaluation of technologies being incorporated to ensure optimal curriculum design.
- e) **Student Engagement**
  - i. Evaluation of the student experience optimised through engaging students as co-creators in the design
- f) **Management**
  - i. Evaluation of how programme information kept up-to- date and communicated to prospective and current students,
  - ii. Evaluation of how well are facilities, learning resources used.
  - iii. Evaluation of programme staffing structures and operations of the Course Board.
  - iv. Evaluation of opportunities for students, staff, external examiners and other stakeholders to provide feedback and how that feedback is acted upon.

### 3 The review process

#### 3.1 Overview

The quality review process is framed by national legislation and international good practice. UL's quality review process includes self-evaluation by the unit followed by peer review, which leads to the formulation and implementation of enhancement activities. The scope of the review encompasses only the unit under review and the programmes agreed with the Head of Department. The Department's review is conducted by an independent quality review group (QRG) and where relevant, a programme review group (PRG) comprising a chairperson, academic peers and employer/professional and student representatives.

#### 3.2 Phases of the review process

The review process has three distinct phases:

1. Pre-review phase,
2. Review phase
3. Post-review phase

##### 3.2.1 The pre-review phase

The pre-review phase of the quality review process comprises the following activities:

1. A self-evaluation exercise conducted by the department
2. The production of a self-assessment report (SAR) by the department

3. A self-evaluation exercise led by the Course Director and comprising members of the course boards for each of the programmes agreed in 2.1
4. The production of a programme self-assessment report (PSAR) for each programme

### 3.2.1.1 Departmental

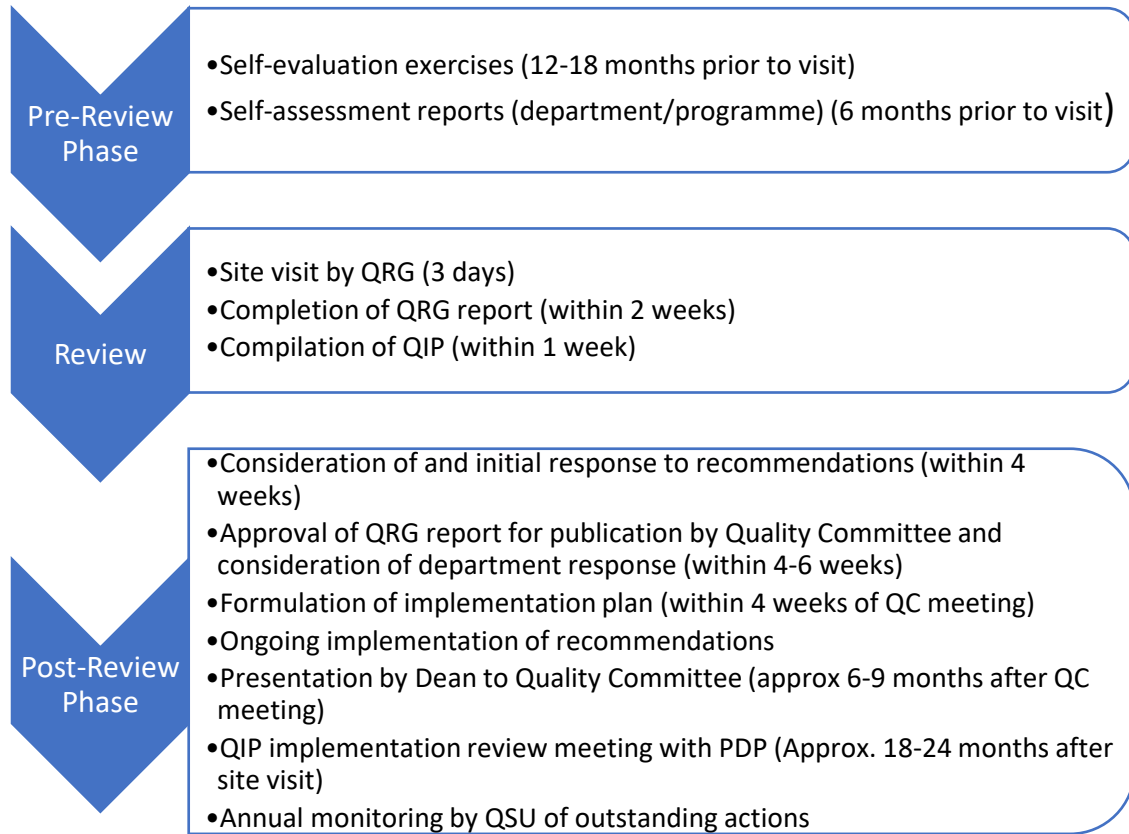


Figure 1: Overview of Departmental Phases and Timelines Programme

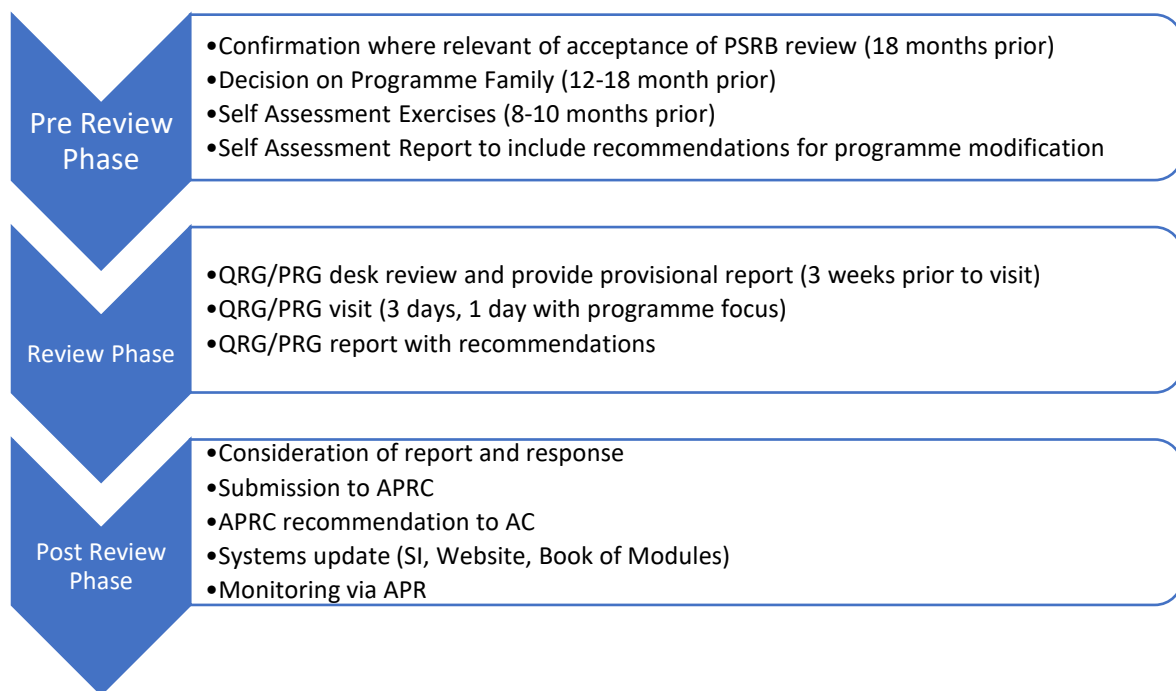


Figure 2: Overview of Programme Review Phases and Timelines

### 3.2.2 The review phase

The review phase of the process refers to the period during which the desk review of departmental and programme self-assessment documentation takes place and time period during which the quality review group (QRG) visits UL (the site visit) to meet with the department under review and its stakeholders.

#### 3.2.2.1 Review Visit Models

The model of the review visit used will be dependent on the number of programme families included in the scope of review. There are three models envisaged:

1. Single
2. Dual
3. Multiple

Figure 3 outlines the single model where the review takes place over a 3-day period and the QRG takes on the role of departmental and programme quality review group.

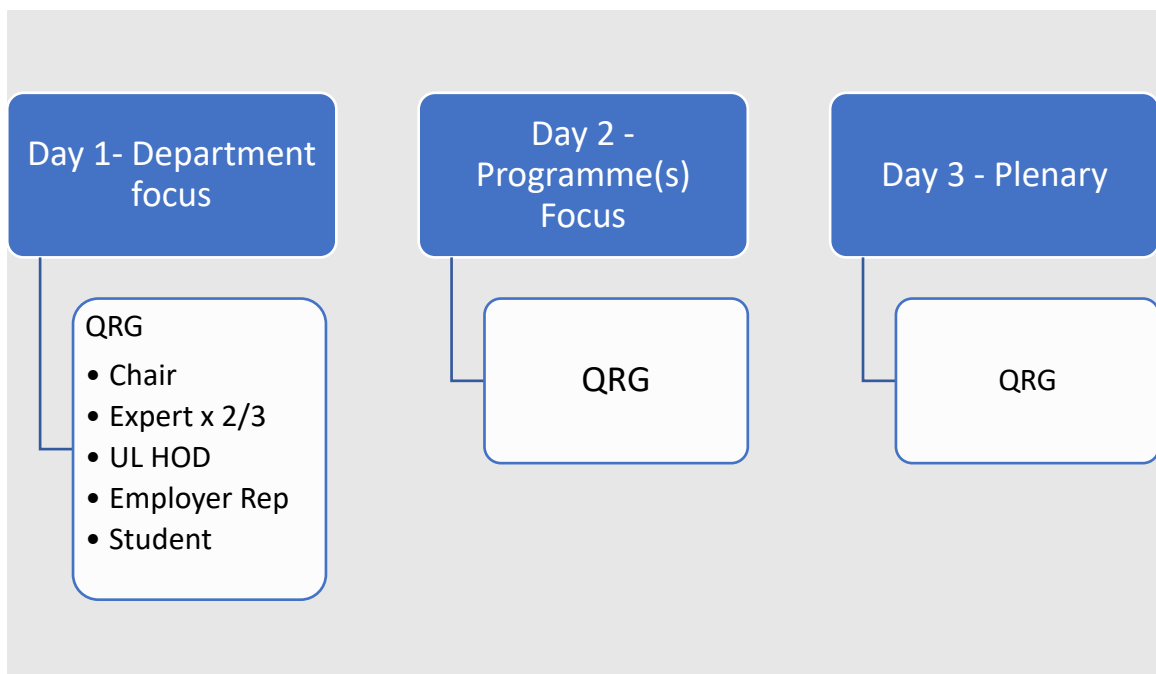


Figure 3: Single Model: QRG Configuration for Review with 1 programme family

Figure 4 below outlines the Dual/Multiple model where the core QRG splits into two groups to evaluate programmes and reconvenes on day 3 to bring their findings together.



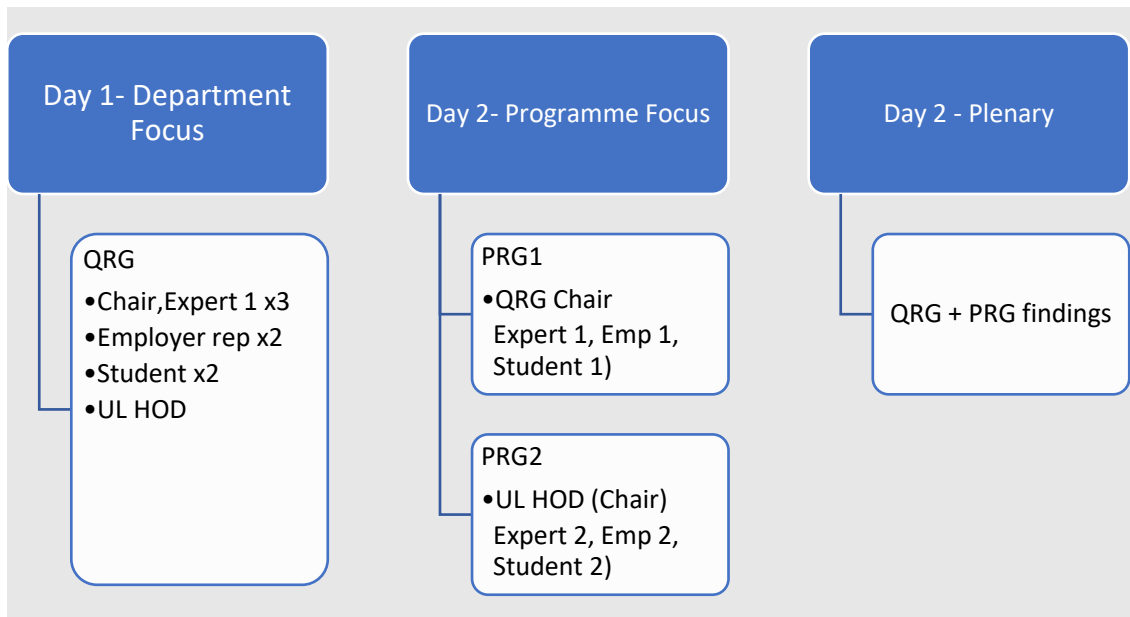


Figure 4: Dual/Multiple model QRG Configuration for Review with 2 programme families

The model will be scaled to support multiple programme families, however if the number of families exceeds three, a second week of reviews may be required to be scheduled.

### 3.2.2.2 Review Reports

The QRG will publish a departmental level report and a report for each programme evaluated as part of the review.

#### QRG report

The QRG report follows a QSU report template. All members of the QRG have collective responsibility for the contents of the report. The main body of the report lists the QRG's commendations and recommendations to the department. Recommendations are divided into two categories, level 1 and level 2. Level 1 recommendations are those that the QRG believes to be particularly significant in assisting the department to better achieve its mission and meet the needs of its stakeholders.

#### Programme Review Reports

The PRG will issue a report for each programme outlining their recommendations and commendations for individual programmes. These recommendations may

1. endorse the recommendations for modification made by the Programme Review Team
2. reject or modify the recommendations for modification made by the Programme Review Team
3. add additional recommendations

These reports form the basis of applications to Academic Council for programme or module modification.

### 3.2.3 The post-review phase

The post review phase of the combined departmental and programme review splits into two parallel tracks, the development and implementation of the Departmental QIP and typically, the more immediate implementation of identified programme improvements arising from the review process.

### *3.2.3.1 Departmental Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)*

Implementing the QIP is the responsibility of the department and, ultimately, the relevant dean. The QSU plays a largely coordinating role in the process. In addition to the Head of Department, and dean, the Quality Committee and the PDP are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the QIP. Recommendations that would equally apply to one or more other faculties may be pursued at university level rather than department level. Responsibility for following up on such recommendations will be assigned by the PDP.

### *3.2.3.2 Implementation of Programme Improvement Plans (PIPs)*

Responsibility for implementing the PIP lies with the Course Director and Course Board. The programme reports are presented to the Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) as evidence for applications for programme and/or module modification. Any modifications recommended for implementation are processed on the APRC database in accordance with the operational requirements of the University.

Monitoring of the impact of the implementation of recommendations on individual programmes takes place through annual programme review/monitoring.

## **4 Key Roles and Responsibilities**

### **4.1 Departmental Quality Team**

The first step of the process is for the Head of Department/School to appoint a quality team from within the department. Typically comprising approximately 8 to 10 persons, the team should be put in place at least 12 months before the scheduled QRG visit. The Head of Department must be a member of the team but does not have to act as chairperson. The chairperson of the team (referred to as the quality team leader) should be a senior member of the department. The quality team should be as representative as possible of the staff profile of the department. The department must inform the QSU of the names of the quality team members.

### **4.2 Programme Review Team**

Members of the programme teaching team or Course Board should be considered as the quality team for each programme.

### **4.3 Review Co-ordinator**

A member of the Quality Support Unit who is the liaison between the Department and Programme Review Teams and the Quality Review Group. The Review Co-ordinator works with the Quality Team leader to manage preparation for the review and the co-ordination of the review event.

### **4.4 Quality Review Group (QRG)**

The QRG typically comprises of six persons. Where more than one programme family is included in the scope of review the membership of the QRG may be extended to provide a suitable breadth of expertise to facilitate the parallel running of programme specific meetings.

The Director of Quality consults with the Head of Department and/or independently identifies potential candidates. The Director of Quality takes due diligence in relation to the suitability of all potential QRG members. Once s/he is satisfied with the calibre, impartiality and independence of the potential candidates, the Director of Quality makes recommendations on the composition of the

QRG to the PDP, who then appoints the members. Once appointed and prior to the visit, any necessary communication between the department and members of the QRG must be facilitated by the QSU.

In the case of a late withdrawal of one member of the group, it may be possible to co-opt a replacement or to continue with just four members; this decision will be taken by the Director of Quality in consultation with the QRG chairperson. If the chairperson withdraws the Director of Quality will appoint a replacement chair, normally from outside of the University.

#### **4.5 Quality Review Group Chair**

The primary roles of the chairperson are:

- To project manage the QRG site visit meetings and reporting process
- To ensure that the QRG review and reporting process is conducted in accordance with the review guidelines document (this document) and that the process is independent, impartial and evidence-based
- To act as a liaison person between the QRG, the PRG and the QSU or other stakeholders
- To provide preliminary feedback on the draft DSAR

#### **4.6 Programme Review Group (PRG)**

Depending on the number of programme families being reviewed within a department an extension of the QRG may be required to create a Programme Review Group (PRG) as a sub-committee of the QRG. This extension will allow the parallel review of the programme families within the normal review timeframe of 2-3 days. In order to preserve continuity between the departmental and programme focus, the PRG will always have a representative from the QRG as a member. The PRG will be chaired by the QRG chair or a senior academic staff member within UL (normally another Head of Department).

#### **4.7 Programme Review Group Chair**

The role of the Programme Review Group Chair is to manage the evaluation of the specific review of a programme family in accordance with scope of the programme review set out in 1.3.2 above. This includes ensuring that the report is completed according to the template provided.

## 5 Document Control

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