



Student Satisfaction Survey: Frequently Asked Questions for Academic Staff

Initial release, 22nd June 2018

Student Satisfaction Survey Frequently Asked Questions for Academic Staff

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General Questions about the UL Student Satisfaction Survey

Q1 What is the Student Satisfaction Survey?

The Student Satisfaction Survey is an online survey, based on the UK's National Student Survey (NSS). The survey is circulated to all students registered on taught programmes across all UL faculties this year. It is designed to provide students with the opportunity to provide commentary and meaningful feedback on both their course and the broader university supports. The specific questions included in the survey are given at the end of this document.

Q2 What is the purpose of the survey?

The survey provides feedback from students outlining what they liked about their time at UL and what they think could be improved. This feedback is aimed at course directors, course boards, heads of departments¹, faculty deans, heads of support divisions and affiliates to assure and enhance the quality of a course and the broader university supports. The questions focus on the course as whole. At an institutional level, the use of a systematic survey helps us meet national and international quality obligations, and aggregate data can serve as a useful starting point for discussions during institutional, faculty and departmental quality reviews.

Q3 What questions are asked in the survey?

In addition to their overall satisfaction with UL and their course, students are asked how satisfied they are with each of the following areas:

- Teaching and Learning
- Assessment and Feedback
- Academic Support
- Course Organisation and Management
- Learning Resources
- Personal Development
- Work Placements
- Academic Integrity²

“Appendix A – Survey instrument” lists all of the questions asked in the survey.

Q4 What is the QSU's role in the survey?

The QSU is responsible solely for administering the survey instrument on behalf of the university, as well as generating and distributing the resultant survey reports. The QSU also publishes institutional level summaries for the past 3 years on its website (<https://www.ul.ie/quality/quality-ul/surveys>). The QSU has no role in follow-up actions, which are a matter for individual course directors, course boards, heads of department and/or the academic line management system, as appropriate.

¹ In these FAQs, reference to departments includes schools and reference to heads of department includes heads of school.

² These questions are taken from a module of the national studentsurvey.ie (paused for review this year) and have been reused with permission.
Quality Support Unit

Q5 Are such surveys undertaken in other third-level institutions?

Yes. Systematic surveys designed to gather student opinion on courses and teaching are a growing feature of university life, both nationally and internationally.

Q6 Are all students surveyed?

Only currently registered students from taught programmes in the academic year that the survey is running are surveyed. Research postgraduate students are not included in this survey; these are surveyed by UL's Graduate and Professional Studies Unit.

Q7 How do you decide on what students to invite to participate in the survey?

Academic Registry provide the Quality Support Unit with a list of currently registered students in the relevant academic year (taught programmes only). This list is used to generate the list of student invitations to participate in the survey.

Q8 How many student invitations are sent for the survey annually?

In any given semester, approximately 16,500 students (a combination of undergraduate, postgraduate, degree and non-degree) receive invitations to participate in the survey. The currently registered student list that Academic Registry provide to the Quality Support Unit is used to identify the appropriate students to include.

Q9 Are research postgraduate students surveyed?

No, research postgraduate students are not included in this survey; these are surveyed by UL's Graduate and Professional Studies Unit.

Q10 Are students from linked providers surveyed?

No, only currently registered students (non-research) that are registered as UL students on SI, UL's student records system, are included in the survey. Linked providers (such as MIC) are responsible for ensuring that they provide appropriate feedback mechanisms for their students.

Q11 When is the survey launched each year?

The survey is launched in the spring semester.

Q12 When does the survey close each year?

The survey usually closes after 4 weeks.

Q13 How will students be invited to participate in the exit survey?

Students will receive a personalised email from ulsurvey@ul.ie to their UL student email account, asking them to participate in the UL Student Satisfaction Survey. The unique link for each student to complete the survey will be included in this email, along with some information in relation to the survey and a list of FAQs.

Q14 I am a course director and would like a “targeted” reminder sent to my class. Who do I contact to request this?

Contact the QSU survey administrators at quality@ul.ie and state that you would like a target reminder sent. Please remember to include the following information: the name of the programme, the date that you would like the reminder to be sent and any other information that you would like included in the reminder. Please allow a minimum of 2 working days’ notice to the QSU when requesting a targeted reminder.

Q15 Is there a generic link to the survey that I can send to my students to allow them to complete the survey?

No. The survey software is designed to generate unique links for each student and to automatically included these links in any email correspondence. If you would like to encourage students to complete the survey, please contact quality@ul.ie and request a “targeted reminder” for your class (please refer to 4).

Q16 I would like to encourage my students to complete the survey, what can I do to help?

In our experience, the most successful way to encourage students to complete the survey is for a course director to talk to the students in class and ask them to complete the survey. If you would like to coincide this talk with an email reminder to the students, please contact quality@ul.ie and request a “targeted” reminder to be sent to your class. Please remember to include the following information: the name of the programme, the date that you would like the reminder to be sent and any other information that you would like included in the reminder. Please allow a minimum of 2 working days’ notice to the QSU when requesting a targeted reminder.

Q17 I have ideas to improve the exit survey. Who do I talk to?

Please send your suggestions to us at quality@ul.ie

Q18 Will the survey process be reviewed?

As process owner, instigation of a review will be at the behest of the Office of the Provost & Deputy President.

Analysis

Q19 What cohort of students does the survey refer to?

The survey year refers to all current registered taught students across all years of a programme, e.g. Survey 2024 refers to all current registered students on taught programmes (Year 1 to Final Year) in academic year 2023/4.

Q20 How is the data analysed?

In the first instance, the data is anonymised and no student name is ever linked to the data provided in standard reports. The quantitative data is analysed in Excel using prescribed reporting templates. The Quality Support Unit (QSU) reviews qualitative commentary from surveys as part of the standard survey reporting process. Some commentary may be redacted or anonymised as deemed necessary prior to standard report distribution. The following standard reports are then generated and circulated as listed below:

Report type	Circulation
University level report	Executive Committee / Academic Council
Institutional summary for the web	Public / online
Department reports	HoD and faculty dean
Programme reports	Course director/board and HoD
Support Department reports	Head of unit and line leader

Q21 How is the percentage satisfaction / "aggregate agree score" calculated?

The "aggregate agree score", as used in the NSS, is the sum of the "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, divided by the total number of valid responses for each question. The number of valid responses is the total number of responses less the "n/a" (not applicable) responses. A sample calculation is given below.

Let's say that 100 students respond to a question with the following response distribution:

strongly agree	50
agree	20
Neither agree nor disagree	10
Disagree	10
Strongly disagree	15
n/a	5

The "aggregate agree score" or percentage satisfaction is calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{strongly agree} + \text{agree}}{\text{Total} - \text{n/a}} = \frac{(50+20)}{(100-5)} = 74\%$$

Q22 Why is commentary “cleansed”/redacted?

The Quality Support Unit (QSU) reviews qualitative commentary from surveys as part of the standard survey reporting process. Some commentary may be redacted or anonymised as deemed necessary prior to standard report distribution, in accordance with the process outlined in the *Guidelines on Redaction of Qualitative Responses in QSU Surveys*. The aim of redaction or anonymization of standard reports is to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the survey as a quality assurance and enhancement instrument by preventing the publication of potentially false negative statements in relation to individuals. Profanities are also removed during this process.

Q23 Is commentary “cleansing” / redaction standard practice?

Yes, both the UK’s NSS (on which the exit survey is based) and ISSE (Irish Survey of Student Engagement) have policies of anonymising and cleansing commentary prior to releasing the data to institutions.

Reporting

Q24 What is the minimum response threshold for reporting?

The minimum response threshold is *at least ten responses and at least 20% response rate*. In cases where this minimum response rate is not met, the standard report that is generated for the programme/department is a “comment only” report. This report does not contain any graphs, but contains any comments made by students.

Q25 Are the survey results published?

An institutional summary report is published online annually on the QSU website (<https://www.ul.ie/quality/quality-ul/surveys>). See Q20 and Q26 for further information in relation to the circulation of reports.

Q26 What happens to the survey results?

Once the survey closes, QSU staff download the results into different standard reports. These standard reports are fully anonymised and student names are not linked to these reports. As summarised in Q22, the following reports are generated:

- An overall aggregate report is provided to UL senior management (including the president, vice presidents and deans).
- A public report is published on the [Student Surveys](#) page of the QSU website.
- Heads of department receive detailed reports relevant to all the programmes run by their department.
- Course directors receive detailed reports relevant to the specific programme they manage.
- Reports are generated for heads of support divisions/units based on commentary made by students.

The survey results are then discussed at university, department and course board level with a view to improving the student experience.

Q27 Who sees the results and are they confidential?

The results for any one programme are made available to (a) the course director (b) the relevant HoD (c) the relevant faculty dean and (d) members of Executive Committee and Academic Council as part of an aggregate report. The course director is expected to share the results with the course board. The results for any one programme are confidential to this group of individuals.

The aggregate department results are made available to (a) the relevant HoD and (b) the relevant faculty dean. These aggregate department results are also included in the report to Executive Committee and Academic Council.

Survey results may be used for reporting purposes at programme, department, faculty or university level. Examples of such reports include the summary institutional-level report (available on the [Student Surveys](#) page of the QSU website), the report prepared for Executive Committee and reports that individual faculties may wish to include in, for example, their quality review self-assessment report.

Q28 What information does a standard survey report contain?

The standard survey report contains the university satisfaction levels for each question presented in tabular format followed by a series of graphs (one for each quantitative question) and the commentary provided by students. Various benchmarking and trend analysis tables are also included in these reports such as comparisons between the university results from the previous five years or comparison of the department/programme to the university results. Note that student commentary is only provided in the department and programme level reports and not in the university level / web reports.

Q29 What information does a support department report contain?

A support department report contains all of the commentary made in relation to the support department/ services provided by the department. In most cases, there are no direct questions asked in relation to specific support departments and the report comments are extracted from student commentary provided in response to “open-ended” questions. The comments are grouped into “positive commendations” and “suggestions” for improvement and are presented in tabular format by question number ascending. Where relevant to the support department, e.g. library and information systems or student academic administration, the programme of study of the respondent is included. If the programme of study is not relevant to the support department, then it is not included in the report. In cases where there are specific questions asked in relation to a support department, quantitative questions are presented in graphical format in the report, followed by qualitative (open-ended) questions in tabular format.

Q30 What is a “comment only” report?

The minimum response threshold for the generation of a standard full report is *at least ten responses and at least 20% response rate*. In cases where this minimum response rate is not met, the standard report that is generated for the programme/department is a “comment only” report. This report does not contain any graphs, but contains any comments made by students.

Q31 Any advice for course directors and heads of department in relation to interpreting and following up on the survey results?

Survey results for a programme should not be considered as an end point but rather as a starting point in terms of reflecting upon, evaluating and enhancing the quality of the programme.

When interpreting the results, the absolute number of respondents and the percentage response rate achieved should be considered. Of course, it would be unsafe to assume that a handful of responses could be considered a reliable indicator of overall student satisfaction levels within a large class. However, it would be equally inappropriate to dismiss survey feedback automatically based on a low response rate. Whatever the response rate/respondent numbers recorded, a follow-up conversation with the students can only help clarify their feedback and, in turn, allow you to respond to that feedback. For example, a class conversation could be incorporated into a lecture for the following year's cohort.

Q32 Any advice for heads of department in relation to interpreting and following up on the survey results?

The head of department receives a copy of all survey reports for all programmes within the department. The reports contain the full programme results in addition to colour-coded (traffic light) tables benchmarking the programme results against the current year's university and department results, and the previous year's programme results. Follow-up actions, which are a matter for individual course directors, course boards, heads of department and/or the academic line management system, as appropriate. With local knowledge of the programme's context and delivery, you (i.e., the HoD) are best placed to determine what follow-up action is appropriate. Where student feedback suggests a significant degree of dissatisfaction, you should immediately discuss this with the relevant course board. If the course board have not planned an exploratory discussion with the following cohort of students, it is appropriate that you request that they do so.

Depending on the circumstances, you may feel it appropriate to explore the issues independently. In consultation with relevant staff, you may wish to avail of assistance from course directors or course boards, the faculty dean or the faculty Assistant Dean Academic Affairs.

Q33 How do I access past survey reports for a programme?

Programme level survey reports are emailed directly to the course director and the head of department is copied. The QSU recommends that course directors and heads of department retain survey reports for their own records (and in accordance with the university's [Records Management Policy](#)). In the first instance, the previous course director and/or head of department should be approached for a copy of the required report. If it is not possible to acquire previous reports in this way, please contact quality@ul.ie to request a copy of the report you require. Please note that the QSU, resource permitting, will only be in a position to provide replacement reports to the relevant course director and/or head of department.

Q34 I am a course director / head of department and have received a “comment only” report. Why is this?

The minimum response threshold is *at least ten responses and at least 20% response rate*. In cases where this minimum response rate is not met, the standard report that is generated for the programme/department is a “comment only” report. This report does not contain any graphs, but contains any comments made by students.

Q35 I am a course director for a small class (<10 students) so my course will never reach the minimum response threshold. Can I request a full report?

Please contact the QSU survey administrators on quality@ul.ie to discuss this and request a full report. We understand that some classes will never reach the minimum response threshold and, resource permitting, can generate a full report, upon request.

Q36 I am not the course director but I do teach on the programme and wish to access the survey results. Who do I contact?

Contact the course director or head of department, who will be best placed to assess your request.

Q37 I am a new course director and I want to request a copy of previous survey reports for my course, whom do I contact?

We recommend that you contact the previous course director or the head of department. Please refer to Q33 for more information.

Q38 I have received the course report and there are some “xxx” references in the comments. Whom can I contact to find out what the “xxx” refers to?

Where “xxx” appears on a report, an individual’s name (or other unique identifier, such as module code) has been removed in accordance with the process outlined in the *Guidelines on Redaction of Qualitative Responses in QSU Surveys*. The QSU will not be in a position to give any additional information in relation to the “xxx” (Please refer to Q22 *Why is commentary “cleansed”/redacted?*).

Q39 I am a course director and have just received the survey report from my course. The number of students on the course does not match the sample size on the report. Why is this?

All currently registered students on taught programmes will be invited to participate in the survey. Academic Registry provide the Quality Support Unit with a list of currently registered students early in March prior to the launch of the survey. Some students may not have registered by the time this list was generated. If students register after this download, then they will not be included in the survey. If there is a very large discrepancy in the number of students on your course and the sample size, please contact Academic Registry, who will be able to investigate and provide the exact number of student registrations.

Q40 Can I include survey reports as part of my CV, academic portfolio or promotion application?

As the survey pertains to the programme of study as a whole, it would not be appropriate to include survey-related data in material such as CV, portfolios and promotion applications.

Appendix A – Survey instrument

Q1. What is the name of the course you are about to complete?

Q2. Which of the following best describes your entry route to this course? (You may choose more than one option if applicable)

q2.1 = Student who entered through CAO

q2.2 = Mature student

q2.3 = Transferee from another UL programme

q2.4 = Transferee from another 3rd level institution

q2.5 = Overseas student studying abroad

q2.6 = Other

Q3. Course Delivery

q3.1 Learning materials made available on my course have enhanced my learning.

q3.2 The range and balance of approaches to teaching helped me to learn.

q3.3 The delivery of my course has been stimulating.

q3.4 My learning has benefited from the modules that are informed by current research.

q3.5 Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q4. Course Workload

q4.1 The workload on my course is manageable.

q4.2 This course does not apply unnecessary pressure on me as a student.

q4.3 The volume of work on my course means that I can always complete it to my satisfaction.

q4.4 I am generally given enough time to understand the things I have to learn.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q5. Course Content and Structure

q5.1 All of the compulsory modules are relevant to my course.

q5.2 There is an appropriate range of options to choose from on my course.

q5.3 The modules of my course form a coherent integrated whole.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q6. Academic Support

q6.1 I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.

q6.2 I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.

q6.3 Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q7. Course Organisation and Management

q7.1 The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.

q7.2 Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.

q7.3 The course is well organised and is running smoothly.

q7.4 Communication between Course Director and students has been efficient and effective.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q8. Course Teaching Standard

q8.1 Staff are good at explaining things.

q8.2 Staff have made the subject interesting.

q8.3 Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.

q8.4 The course is intellectually stimulating.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q9. Personal Development

q9.1 The course has helped me present myself with confidence.

q9.2 My communication skills have improved.

q9.3 As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q10. Intellectual Motivation

q10.1 I found the course motivating.

q10.2 The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study.

q10.3 The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q11. Are there any improvements UL should be making in relation to teaching and course management?

Q12. Student Assessment

q12.1 Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised.

q12.2 Assessment methods employed on my course require an in-depth understanding of the course content.

q12.3 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.

q12.4 The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.

q12.5 The marking scheme for each module was published at the start of the semester.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree 6 = N/A

Q13. Feedback to Students

q13.1 Feedback on my work has been prompt.

q13.2 I have received detailed comments on my work.

q13.3 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q14. Feedback from Students

q14.1 I had adequate opportunities to provide feedback on all elements of my course.

q14.2 My feedback on the course has been listened to and valued.

q14.3 It is clear to me how students' comments on the course have been acted upon.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q15. Are there any improvements UL should be making in relation to assessment and feedback?

Q16. Learning resources

q16.1 The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.

q16.2 I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to.

q16.3 I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q17. Welfare Resources and Facilities

q17.1 There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.

q17.2 When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q18. Work Placements (Coop, Clinical Placement, TP etc)

q18.1 I received sufficient support and advice from my institution about the organisation of my placements.

q18.2 My placements were valuable in helping my learning.

q18.3 My placements helped me to develop my skills in relation to my course.

q18.4 My placements helped me to develop my general life skills.

q18.5 My placements were a worthwhile use of my time.

q18.6 The taught part of my course was good preparation for my placements.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q19. Careers

q19.1 As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects.

q19.2 Good advice is available for making career choices.

q19.3 Good advice is available on further study opportunities.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q20. Are there any improvements UL should be making in relation to resources, placements and careers?

Q21. Social Opportunities

q21.1 I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students.

q21.2 I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies on offer.

q21.3 I am satisfied with the range of entertainment and social events on offer.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q22. The Physical Environment

q22.1 Security has been satisfactory when attending classes.

q22.2 My institution provides an appropriate environment in which to learn.

q22.3 My institution provides an appropriate environment for personal development.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q23. Learning Community

q23.1 I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.

q23.2 I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.

q23.3 I have learned to explore ideas confidently.

q23.4 Within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued.

q23.5 I feel part of an academic community in this university.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q24. Are there any improvements UL should be making in relation to the university environment?

Q25. Overall satisfaction

q25.1 I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

q25.2 I am satisfied with the campus facilities.

q25.3 I am satisfied that I chose to study at UL.

1 = Definitely agree

2 = Mostly agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Mostly disagree

5 = Definitely disagree

6 = N/A

Q26. Looking back on the UL experience, are there any particularly positive aspects you would like to highlight?

Q27. Looking back on the UL experience, are there any particularly negative aspects you would like to highlight?

Q28. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your time at UL?

*Academic Integrity*³

Q29. During the current academic year, about how much support and training has your institution offered you in:

q29.1 Upholding academic integrity and the importance of avoiding academic misconduct.

q29.2 Avoiding plagiarism by referencing correctly.

q29.3 Understanding the risks (e.g., blackmail, extortion) of engaging with individuals or companies offering cheating services.

q29.4 Accessing useful resources and/ or assistance from professional staff to help you to behave ethically.

1 = Very little

2 = Some

3 = Quite a bit

4 = Very much

Q30. Based on your experience during the academic year to date, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

q30.1 I see other students engaging in academic misconduct and getting away with it.

q30.2 I will not be penalised for minor breaches of academic integrity, such as copying a short text or omitting a reference, in my institution.

q30.3 I do not see a problem sharing my completed assignments with others.

q30.4 At times, I have felt pressure to help other students cheat in their assessed assignments or exams.

q30.5 I have been targeted (including being exposed to advertising) by an online cheating service.

q30.6 If I am struggling to get assessed coursework completed, I know where and how I can avail of the support services in my institution.

q30.7 I can discuss any problems I am having related to academic integrity with my lecturers or other staff.

q30.8 My assignments and how they are assessed are designed to reduce the possibility of cheating.

q30.9 My grades are a fair reflection of the work I put in and my level of understanding of the course material.

q30.10 I am confident that I would know if I was acting unethically in my studies.

q30.11 I understand the limits of providing help to others while behaving with academic integrity.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly agree

Q31 In your view, what more could institutions do to help students avoid engaging in academic misconduct?

³ [Topical Module on Academic Integrity](#), Annual HEA [Studentsurvey.ie](#). Definitions from QQI [NAIN](#) & [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#)

Revision History

	Date	Approved by	Details of changes
1	22 June 2018	Director of Quality	Initial release document
2	29 Feb 2024	Director of Quality	Update & Revision