

## QMS Audit Process

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to describe the various audit processes in use by UL. Audits are a reliable mechanism through which the effectiveness of a Quality Management System (QMS) is systematically reviewed for the benefit of the department. An audit is a valuable tool that also allows a department to evaluate its own processes to assure the continual improvement of its QMS. The overriding priority of the audit process is to assist departments in taking full advantage of the benefits of the QMS. The spirit of the process is supportive and enhancement oriented. It is designed to help departments help themselves.

### RESPONSIBILITY

The Quality Officer, Quality Support Unit has overall responsibility for this process.

### PROCEDURE

#### 1.1 Types of Audits

There are currently three types of audit. For the purpose of this process, the following terms will apply:

- **QMS-Audit:** Under the UL Framework, each unit is expected to conduct periodic audits of their QMS. Outcomes from these audits are incorporated into the department's quality improvement plan.
- **Inter-Department Audit:** This is an audit carried out by a panel of trained auditors, some from outside of the department being audited. This audit is focussed on the department's documented QMS and on its key business processes. These audits assist professional units in preparation for their review or when developing a QMS for the first time. Inter-department audits can also be used as part of the self-evaluation process in preparation for a thematic quality review (See Section 4 below for further details.)
- **Gap Analysis:** This is an audit conducted by the Unit, typically one year prior to the department's Quality Review. The [UL QMS Framework](#) documents are used to ascertain the unit's progress to date in developing their QMS and to identify areas which need to be improved. The outcome of this gap analysis can be a very valuable first step in preparation for the quality review. (See Section 5 for further details.)

## 2. Auditors

### 2.1 Selection and Training of Quality Auditors

As part of the QMS development process, all units in UL are encouraged to have a number of trained quality auditors. Each unit is required to nominate at least two members of staff to form the University panel of QMS (inter-department) auditors. Nominations will be requested by the QSU prior to each cycle of quality reviews. Each unit will also appoint a quality team leader for the duration of the review cycle – this is often a member of the management team. The QSU will maintain a register of auditors and quality team leaders.

Auditor training is scheduled by the Quality Support Unit as required.

## 2.2 Role and Responsibilities

An MS Teams site is created by QSU as a central repository for all Inter-Department audits. All members who have agreed to participate have access to the Teams site. The Head of Unit or Quality Team Leader is responsible for submitting a request for an inter-department audit. When a request is received by QSU, an expression of interest email is sent by the Quality Officer seeking auditors to participate. A separate channel is used on the Teams site for each individual audit. Auditors who are participating in each audit are given access to the dedicated channel. An audit schedule will be compiled by the QSU and uploaded to the channel on the Teams site. QMS audits will be conducted as required. The auditor is responsible for reviewing all relevant information pertaining to the audit (processes and procedures) and liaising with the unit to schedule a specific date and time for the audit. The auditor will compile a checklist of questions prior to the audit and share these with the auditee. Following the audit, the auditor will upload the completed checklist to the Teams site as well as the audit report. The Quality Officer will combine all reports and compile one detailed report for each inter-department audit. Once this is received by the unit, they should transfer all audit recommendations into the unit Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for ongoing review and implementation.

## 2.3 Confidentiality

Auditors must exhibit the highest level of professional objectivity and discretion in gathering, evaluating, and communicating information about the activity or process being audited. Complete confidentiality must be maintained at all times. Auditors must make a balanced assessment of all the relevant circumstances and not be unduly influenced by their own interests or by others when documenting the audit findings and writing the audit report.

## 3. The Audit Schedule

Each unit is encouraged to participate in the inter-department audit process prior to their quality review. The QSU will assist in arranging these audits and will liaise with the panel of auditors to schedule dates/times to suit the unit. A full schedule of QMS audits will be maintained by the QSU.

An MS Teams site has been created to act as a central repository of information for inter-department auditing.

## 4. The Inter-Department Audit Procedure

### 4.1 Preparing for the Audit

- The Quality Officer will meet with the departmental quality team leader approximately one month before the audit, for planning purposes. In consultation with the quality team leader, the Quality Officer will put out a call for expressions of interest to participate.
- The quality team leader will provide all relevant documentation to the Quality Officer (key business process, operational procedures & any supporting documentation) approximately 3 weeks before the audit. All documentation will be uploaded to the Teams, using the dedicated channel for the audit.
- The Quality Officer will notify all auditors participating and alerting them that the schedule and process documentation have been uploaded to the site (at least 2 weeks before the audit).
- Auditors will then liaise with the relevant units to schedule preferred dates/times for the audit. Auditors should also familiarise themselves with the Auditing Process and the UL [‘QMS Framework.’](#)

- Auditor(s) will use the documented procedures provided by the department to prepare a list of questions to be used during the audit. It is important that all elements of the quality management system as well as the individual departmental procedures are included in the list. Auditors should ensure that the QMS principles are evident throughout the key business processes (e.g. leadership, customer focus, engagement of people, process approach, continual improvement, evidence-based decision making and relationship management).
- A template for the audit checklist will be available on the Teams site.  
The following information should be included on all audit checklists:
  - Date of audit
  - Name of the auditors
  - Name of the unit being audited and the auditee(s)

#### 4.2 The Actual Audit

Auditors should ensure that all elements of the QMS are reviewed during the audit, as well as the key business processes of the unit. Typically, an audit will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The objective of the audit is to help units help themselves. The audit is a facilitative process which assists units in taking full advantage of the benefits of their QMS. A list of audit questions can be sent to the auditee/process owner prior to the audit.

**Opening Meeting:** Introductions should be made during the opening meeting, and the auditor(s) should outline the structure and scope of the audit and emphasise that it is the unit's process and not the person that is being audited.

**The Audit Trail:** Auditors should bring a copy of the procedures they are auditing along with the prepared questions on their checklist. The following should be discussed during the audit:

- Show me how....(objective evidence);
- Ascertain whether the procedure is effective, reliable and efficient;
- Invite auditees to make suggestions for improvement;
- Ensure QMS principles are evident throughout all business processes.

The auditor must ensure that every element of the QMS is reviewed during the audit.

**Closing Meeting:** Before the audit concludes, review the main issues arising from the audit. Reach consensus of opinion regarding what is and is not an issue/audit recommendation. Only audit findings that have been agreed should be included in the audit report. Auditors should acknowledge the time given by the unit and the support and assistance given during the audit.

#### 4.3 Following an Audit

On completion of the audit, the auditee will upload the audit report and checklist to the Teams site. The Quality Officer will take responsibility to ensure completion of the final (combined) audit report. The audit report should clearly outline any recommendations for improvement resulting from the audit, as well as commendations. These will have previously been discussed at the closing meeting. A template for the Audit Report will be available on the Teams site.

This report is shared with the Director of the unit and the quality team leader, normally within 1 week of the final audit, and a copy is held on the Teams site. A copy of individual audit reports should also be given by the auditor to the auditee. All other documentation, including the paper trail, is given back to the unit for

shredding. Action items arising from the audit are recorded by the unit and included in their quality improvement plan.

## 5. Gap Analysis

Approximately 12 months before their review date, the unit will conduct a gap analysis of their QMS. The self-evaluation questions outlined in the UL QMS Framework documents can be used to ascertain the department's progress to date in implementing an effective quality management system and to outline areas which may need to be improved.

Audit findings from the gap analysis should be incorporated into the department's Quality Improvement Plan. The outcome of this audit can be used to serve as a gap analysis in preparation for the quality review and incorporated into the self-assessment report required for quality review.

A gap analysis can also be performed by a unit after developing a QMS for the first time. QMS Essential outlines the evaluation criteria.

## DOCUMENTATION

The following documents are relevant to this process:

Document	Storage Location	Use
Register of Auditors	<a href="#">List of Trained QMS Auditors</a>	<b>Internal:</b> QSU register of all UL staff who have undertaken auditor training
Register of QTLs/HODs	<a href="#">Quality Team Leaders - Heads of Unit</a>	<b>Internal:</b> QSU list of all Quality Team Leaders and Heads of Unit for professional service units, research institutes and Faculties
Schedule of QMS Inter-Departmental Audits	<a href="#">UL:QMS Inter-Department Audits   General   Microsoft Teams</a>	<b>Internal:</b> Individual audit schedules are stored on the dedicated Teams site for Inter-Departmental audits. A separate channel is used for each audit.
<b>Audit Checklist Template</b>	<a href="#">QMS Audit Checklist Template</a>	A template used by the auditors to document questions for each audit.
<b>Audit Report Template</b>	<a href="#">QMS Audit Report Template</a>	A template used by the auditors to write up the final audit report.
<b>UL QMS Framework</b>	<a href="#">Quality Management Systems   University of Limerick (ul.ie)</a>	A link to the QMS Frameworks in use. Also provides details of the auditing process.



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## RECORDS

The following audit records are held:

- Self-Audits: These records are held by the department for a minimum of three years.
- QMS Audits: QMS audit records and audit paper trails are held by the department for a period of at least 3 years. Copy audit reports are also maintained by the Quality Support Unit.
- Quality Reviews: Records are held by the Quality Support Unit for a period of at least 7 years (retain until superseded to comply with the University [Records Management Policy](#)).

## PROCESS VERIFICATION

Evaluation of process effectiveness is carried out using feedback from the panel of trained auditors, internal review and also by the audit process itself.

Revision No.	Date	Approved by:	Details of Change	Process Owner
1	Nov '12	ART / KOM	Initial Release	Quality Support Unit
2	Jan '13	ART / KOM	Minor edits	QSU
3	Mar '13	ART / KOM	Major review to differentiate between different types of audits	QSU
4	Oct '13	ART / KOM	Slight modification to procedure layout to conform to standard template	QSU
5	Nov '13	ART / KOM	Modified following feedback from QMS auditor training session and Library audits.	QSU
6	Aug '14	ART / KOM	Modified to include UL logo – requirement for UL web policy	QSU
7	Apr '16	Gary Walsh	Modified to coincide with revised guidelines. Recommendations from internal audit (22 Mar) also included.	Kim O'Mahony
8	Mar '17	Gary Walsh	Minor modifications following audit recommendations. Also updated hyperlinks	Kim O'Mahony
9	Mar '18	Gary Walsh	Changes to Gap Analysis section, which is now completed by the Unit. Minor modifications.	Kim O'Mahony
10	Apr '20	Director of Quality	Minor updates following process review by QSU	Quality Officer
11	May '24	Director of Quality	Minor updates following desk review of process. Inclusion of table of related documents with links to storage location	Quality Officer

**Figure 1: Overview of Quality Audit Process**

