Report of the Quality Review Group

to the

Library and Information Services Division (LISD)

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UL QSU Website	www.ul.ie/quality
Unit Website	https://www.ul.ie/library/
QQI Website	www.qqi.ie

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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. The UL Quality Support Unit (QSU) website (www.ul.ie/quality) provides details on the process.

Academic units are reviewed against international standards as described in the document *Quality Review Process for Academic Units,* which is available on the QSU website. The planned schedule of quality reviews for both academic and support units 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 the recommendations of the QRG, devises plans to implement them and reports implementation progress to a Governing Authority subcommittee 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 six months after receiving the QIP template from the QSU, the head of unit provides a summary overview of progress to the university's Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance (GASPQA) sub-committee. GASPQA members are afforded the opportunity to discuss and evaluate progress.

Approximately 12 months after receiving the QIP template, the head of unit, Vice President Academic Affairs & Student Engagement, Dean (where relevant) and Director of Quality meet to formally review progress and to agree on any remaining actions to be taken.

2   Brief Overview of Library and Information Services Division

A primary division of UL, the Library and Information Services Division (LISD) delivers on a complex and diverse mission that advances the success and impact of the university. The division provides a substantial front-line service to the UL community, contributes to achieving UL's goals at a strategic level and has a strong presence within and outside the university. Aware of the vital role the library plays in successful learning and research, LISD staff are committed to user-centred development and to enabling and providing the information resources, high-quality spaces, services and capability necessary to achieve the university's mission.

From an initial enrolment of 100 students in the basement of Plassey House, the library has grown with the university to serve the information needs of over 15,000 students in 2019. LISD provides full access to high-quality academic information and resources, including 500,000 print and electronic books, over 60,000 journal subscriptions and growing special and archival collections. The Lewis L. and Loretta Brennan Glucksman Library was opened in 1998 as a 6,900 square metre, purposely designed library. The building was substantially expanded in 2018 to a 15,000 square metre learning space and now provides 2,200 study seats and a range of specialist spaces. In terms of the student experience, the new library building is a key asset for UL both as an enabler of learning and research and as a venue for community and regional engagement.

The library staff complement in 2019 is 46 FTE staff in and services are delivered in-person and by self-service and online. One-to-one support is provided via a staffed service desk and the Ask Us/Tell Us online enquiry service. Dedicated subject specialist assistance, information skills classes, research services and specific services for new students are also provided. The division provides learners, researchers and scholars with collections, space and advice for their study and assists them in developing the competencies necessary for learning, research, employment and lifelong empowerment in an information-intensive world.

LISD provides leadership on campus on key issues that affect scholarship, such as information literacy, publishing strategies, open access, copyright and information management. The division deploys its expertise to manage, preserve and promote the information assets of the university and provides open access to UL's research output via the University of Limerick Institutional Repository. LISD developed the UL Digital Library to showcase resources from the library collections.

LISD plays a strong leadership role on the Irish Universities Association Librarians Group (IUALG) and the Irish Consortium of National and University Libraries (CONUL). The division is a founding member of the Irish Research electronic Library (IReL), which is a consortial purchasing agency for electronic journals with an annual budget of €9 million. LISD is a member of SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries), which represents third-level libraries in the UK and Ireland; LIBER (Association of European Research Libraries); and CNI (the US-based Coalition for Networked Information).

3   Preliminary Comments of the Quality Review Group (QRG)

The Quality Review Group (QRG) wishes to thank the University of Limerick (UL) for the welcome and support received throughout the exercise. The QRG greatly appreciated the open, collegial and constructive way in which staff of the Library and Information Services Division (LISD) engaged in the review. In particular, we wish to commend LISD for their self-assessment report (SAR) which provided a clear account of the division's activities and made very effective use of evidence-based evaluation. We also appreciated the timely manner in which LISD responded to requests for additional information; together with the SAR, these provided a valuable basis for our discussions.

The QRG met with stakeholders including students and staff who were very supportive and appreciative of the services provided. In particular, academic and professional service staff emphasised the extent to which LISD is proactive and responsive in identifying and meeting staff and student needs. Students expressed their appreciation for the flexibility of study spaces in the new building and also praised the support provided by library staff, for example through the information desk and the range of social media platforms. The short video guides were highlighted as particularly useful. All of the LISD staff who met the QRG were enthusiastic about their work and are clearly ambitious to play a full part at the heart of the university.

The library building represents a considerable investment and presence on campus, which is welcomed by stakeholders and which has enabled the university to meet current library space norms in terms of the current student population. As student numbers continue to grow, it is important that the library is able to retain the current space allowance. Furthermore, in order to realise the full potential of the investment in the building, attention should be given to the staffing levels which are currently below the norms in the Irish university sector. LISD has made considerable efforts, notably through its imaginative use of students, to ameliorate the position, but it is evident that the shortfall in staff resources is inhibiting the extent to which LISD can fully contribute to the achievement of the university's strategic ambitions in research, community engagement and academic transformation.

Academic staff highlighted the importance of LISD to the university's reputation, citing examples of leadership and collaboration with the wider community, including businesses and international scholars, through hosting events and curating exhibitions. With the appropriate resources, it is clear there is no shortage of willingness or creativity on the part of LISD staff to continue making a substantial contribution to the success of the university. Investing in library services is a way for the university to invest in excellence.

4   QRG Commendations and Recommendations

4.1   Commendations

The QRG commends the following:

1	The impressive improvement in user satisfaction indicated by the LibQUAL survey data between 2007 and 2018.
2	LISD's rapid response to student feedback, which results in an improved student experience.
3	The high level of stakeholder, including student, engagement and support for the library.
4	The commitment to employing students for various activities such as the Student Peer Advisor initiative and the Every Seat Counts campaign.
5	The effective use of a wide variety of channels for library communications, including publications, brochures, the library website and social media such as Snapchat and Instagram.
6	The different types of study space available within the library, which support a variety of learning styles.
7	The provision of highly valued, dedicated study space for postgraduate students.
8	The greater visibility and accessibility of the new high-quality special collections storage, reader and work spaces.
9	The introduction of training videos as a way of satisfying demand for information literacy skills.
10	The opportunities for a range of public activities, including civic engagement and executive education, afforded by the innovative design and use of space in the library, such as the Appellate Court.
11	The willingness to innovate with new ways of working, illustrated by the introduction of the new Automated Reserve Collection (ARC) retrieval system and the use of RFID to enable the re-engineering of the book acquisition process.
12	The exemplary success of LISD in managing strategic projects, including: the extended Glucksman Library, the installation of the ARC system and transitioning to a new library management system.
13	The strong commitment demonstrated by LISD to the university's Performance and Development Review System (PDRS), which provides a framework for goal setting in alignment with UL and LISD goals and for identifying training needs.
14	The provision and support for staff training and development across the division.

4.2   Recommendations

The QRG recommends the following:

4.2.1   Level 1 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1	Grow the staff complement to build capacity to protect the service improvements and innovations made possible by the new library extension and expected of an academic library in the 21st century.	The current staff complement of 46 FTE benchmarks poorly against peer libraries in Ireland. The library has expanded its range of services, and in some areas critical expertise is vested in single roles. Fulfilling the university's plan to increase student numbers to 20,000 will place further pressure on the library.
2	Develop job descriptions and person specifications that are appropriate to new roles to ensure that the library has the skills and competencies required to support the university's strategic development.	Recently, the library was unsuccessful in its efforts to appoint staff to roles in the area of learning technology and research data management. Bringing more flexibility into the recruitment process will mean the library can benefit from the incorporation of new professional skills into the organisation.
3	Prioritise the recruitment of staff who can partner with existing library staff and academic colleagues to develop and promote services around the key areas of digital scholarship and open science.	Increasingly, students – undergraduate, postgraduate and those in executive education – are learning by engaging with digital resources in virtual environments, and the library is a key player in this emerging pedagogy. Compliance with research funders' requirements for open scholarship is a key success factor for the university's research ambitions.
4	Highlight to senior university leaders the importance of matching or exceeding the mean budget allocation of Irish Universities Association (IUA) libraries for information resources.	The information resources budget of €88 per FTE student is the lowest allocation among the IUA libraries.
5	Develop the potential of Alma (the library management system) and Leganto (the reading list system) to improve the availability of texts essential to taught modules. This may involve automating processes and the transfer of reading list management to staff focused on the acquisition of resources.	Access to resources specified by academic staff is key to student success. The academic staff must partner in this process by regularly updating reading lists (at least annually) and ensuring that these are available in the virtual learning environment.

6	Ensure there is consistency in the levels and types of service available to library users across all academic areas within the university and develop plans to address any apparent weaknesses.	This will help to identify and share best practice, prioritising where additional support is needed.
7	Complete the refurbishment of the library including the former Special Collections area.	Completion of this refurbishment will provide much needed additional reader space.
8	Protect the current student-to-seat ratio and prioritise study spaces for students.	The current study spaces are key to providing a high-quality student learning experience and affect the university's reputation. The current student-to-seat ratio is at an acceptable level, and with student numbers projected to reach 20,000 it is very important to maintain all study spaces for that purpose.
9	Respond to student demand for extended opening hours to the library building and its facilities, liaising with student representatives.	A recurring request made by students is to have 24-hour access to library study spaces, especially in the lead-up to exams. Postgraduate students in particular have highlighted a desire for improved access during vacations.
10	Enhance and record the library's contribution to the university's mission of civic engagement.	The library already plays an important role in civic engagement via initiatives such as exhibitions, events and digitisation projects. Its strategy should achieve a measurable, reportable impact in areas of civic engagement that best align with the university's broader mission.
11	Continue to engage with university management to secure the library's involvement with the university's city centre initiative.	The city centre initiative provides opportunities to catalyse collaborations with a range of partners. Some of the examples, which highlight civic engagement, include collaboration with the Hunt museum and the public library system. The library's engagement may require a cost benefit analysis.
12	Liaise with UL senior management to ensure that LISD maintains a strong leadership position within the university's governance structure.	Reporting directly to the VPAASE is highly beneficial to all stakeholders including students, the university and the wider community. Maintaining a strong leadership role will ensure LISD input in the development and realisation of UL strategy.

4.2.2 Level 2 recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Commentary
1	Develop a library staff succession plan.	In an environment where recruitment and retention of staff with the necessary skills is difficult, succession planning will be

		a useful tool in taking a long-term view of the library human resources development.
2	Present operational statistics and details of KPIs annually to the most appropriate senior institutional deliberative committee.	Senior leaders, including those with academic management responsibility, should be made aware of pressures and issues facing the library as the university develops new research areas and new academic programmes. Senior leaders would be better equipped to support the library in its engagement with the mission and strategy of the university.
3	Explore the provision of a catering service during extended opening hours.	A recurring request made by students is to have the Plaza Café's opening hours align more closely with the library hours.
4	Assign a library staff member as the main point of contact for student officers.	This would formalise a connection between library staff and student representatives.

Appendices

A   Membership of the QRG

Dr. Ailsa Crum (Chair)	Head of Quality & Enhancement QAA Scotland
Mr. Gerald R. Beasley	Carl A. Kroch University Librarian, Cornell University, USA
Dr. Stella Butler	University Librarian & Keeper of the Brotherton Collection, University of Leeds
Mr. Jack Shelly	Student Representative
Dr. Colm Cunniffe	Cooperative Education Manager, Science & Engineering, University of Limerick
Ms. Ailish O'Farrell	Technical Writer

B   Membership of LISD Quality Team

Ciara McCaffrey	Deputy Librarian
Ken Bergin	Head, Special Collections & Archives
Louise O'Shea	Librarian, Administration
Helena Feighan	Executive Administrator, Administration
Justine Bennett	Librarian, Cataloguing & Metadata services
Helen Enright	Senior Library Assistant, Reader Services
Siobhan Morrissey	Senior Library Assistant, Information Services
Sean Fox	Library Assistant, Collection Services
Breda Murphy	Library Assistant, Information Desk
Gwen Dineen	Library Attendant

C   Membership of LISD Self-Evaluation Team

Gobnait O'Riordan	Director, Library & Information Services
Ciara McCaffrey	Deputy Librarian
Caleb Derven	Head, Technical & Digital Services
Mary Dundon	Head, Reader Services
Ashling Hayes	Head, Research Services
Aoife Geraghty	Head, Research Services (interim)
Michelle Breen	Head, Information Services
Ken Bergin	Head, Special Collections & Archives
Kirsten Mulrennan	Archivist, Engagement, Exhibition & Outreach
Helena Feighan	Executive Administrator, Administration
Micheál O hAodha	Librarian, Science & Engineering
Sinéad Keogh	Librarian, Digital Services
Louise O'Shea	Librarian, Administration
Louise Hanrahan	Library Assistant, Reader Services
Tracy Howard	Library Attendant